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BATTLES WITH GIANT FISH

READY SHORTLY

MY VOYAGE TO THE UNKNOWN

BY

LADY RICHMOND BROWN

F.L.S., F.Z.S., F.R.G.S., F.R.A.I.

*Profusely Illustrated from Photographs by the
Author.*

This volume, companion to Mr. Mitchell
Hedges's "Battles with Giant Fish," deals
with other remarkable results of the same
adventurous expedition.

DUCKWORTH & CO. LONDON



THE AUTHOR AND HIS NATIVE FISHERMAN ON A CORAL REEF IN
THE CARIBBFAN.

BATTLES WITH GIANT FISH

BY

F. A. MITCHELL HEDGES
F.L.S., F.Z.S., F.R.G.S., F.R.A.I.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY
LADY RICHMOND BROWN



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TO
LADY RICHMOND BROWN

A "DAMNED GOOD SPORTSMAN," WITHOUT
WHOSE INSPIRATION AND HELP THESE BATTLES
WOULD BE YET UNFOUGHT. THE BEST OR
WORST OF ANY INDIVIDUAL COMES OUT IN THE
PRIMITIVE WILDS, AND IT IS TO "ONE OF THE
BEST" I PAY A GRATEFUL TRIBUTE IN THIS
BOOK

You've seen nature's mighty grandeurs
'Midst a roaring hell of waters ;
Lived in the great wide spaces,
Your canopy the skies,
Go back to where the Golden Calf
Cannot hold your soul in bondage ;
Do things just for the doing,
Peace and happiness your prize.

F. A. M. H.

INTRODUCTION

IN writing this book I have done my best to draw a picture of the strange life which exists beneath the surface of the Seven Seas. It is a world of its own, in many ways stranger than that on land.

It would be impossible to describe accurately in words the grotesque and remarkable appearance of many of these inhabitants of the deep seas. I have often been asked : " How large do you think the biggest fish grow ? " and my answer is always : " I haven't the slightest idea, but they undoubtedly weigh many tons."

Big game hunting has of late years lost much of its attraction, largely owing to the fact that modern arms have been conducive to indiscriminate slaughter, and that the sport has to-day become confined to those who are fortunate enough to have a well-lined purse. Big game fishing and the hunting of beasts in their marine home is still in its infancy. There is a thrill and danger attached to it which will be welcomed by all true sportsmen ; and one need have no compunction in ridding the ocean of certain species, for nothing living to-day on land can compare with the savagery and ruthlessness of—as an example—the tiger shark.

There has been no need for me to write a technical description of the best tackle to be employed, and the method of fishing in the ordinary way, as this has been so fully and completely dealt with in that remarkably interesting book *Modern Sea Angling*, by Mr. F. D. Holcombe, the well-known Honorary Secretary of the British Sea Anglers' Society, as to leave nothing further for one to add.

Mr. Holcombe has placed before the angling fraternity

the practical observations and work of a lifetime, coupled with the authentic data which he has been in a unique position to obtain.

I can only add that it will always be a pleasure to give any information I can to my brother anglers.

F. A. M. H.

SANDBANKS,
PARKSTONE,
DORSET.

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BOOK I

CHAPTER I

MONSTERS OF THE DEEP—PREHISTORIC AND PRESENT SEA LIFE

SINCE my school-days I have always been keenly interested in the subject of Life as it existed in the remote distance of the past, thousands—probably millions—of years ago. I was, and still am, fascinated by simply conjuring up in my mind a vision of a probable scene during, say, the Mesozoic period, such as a battle-royal between that enormous fish-lizard, the ichthyosaurus, and the gigantic long-necked plesiosaurus, with that monstrosity, the pterodactyl, a huge reptile with wings shaped like a bat but with a spread of 20 to 30 feet, flying overhead. The struggle would probably take place in a swamp, amidst trees of almost unthinkable height and beauty, such as the great tree fern, which still exists in a modified form in regions as widely separated as New Zealand and Jamaica.

These terrible creatures have vanished with the successive changes that have occurred on the surface of the earth, but it has for many years been in my mind that in unknown tropical waters and in the depths of the Seven Seas, where more protection has been afforded, there still exist monsters comparably as great as those living in a remote epoch.

It was over twenty years ago that I commenced my investigations, and since then I have fished many waters in various parts of the world, but I was mostly interested in that part of the Pacific coast which stretches from the Gulf of Lower California to the Colombian border, also in the Caribbean, including the

vicinities of Jamaica, Colombia, and Panama. My experiences in these expanses only served to corroborate my views.

One frequently hears exaggerated tales of great fish. A report appears in the press that Captain X of the s.s. Z observed a huge monster playing on the top of the water in . . .—here follows the latitude and longitude—and people smile. From other quarters come tales of the mythical sea-serpent, and huge fish seen with tusks.

When asked if I believe in the existence of creatures almost past the imagination in the depths of the ocean, my answer is an unqualified "Yes"; and I will proceed to give briefly my reasons for this definite assertion of fact, and to prove that there exist, in virtually unknown and known waters, forms of life which still remain much the same as they were millions of years ago.

The earliest animals in the world known to Science are the corals and sponges, and they have remained corals and sponges for 25,000,000 years, and in tropical waters still exist in profusion in varying forms. Sea-anemones and medusæ (or jelly-fish) also existed in much the same form during the dawn-life period as they do to-day. Specimens can be seen in the waters surrounding the shores of Great Britain, America, and in most countries, at all times of the year.

During the Mesozoic period, reptilian, mammal, and fish life was so grotesque and monstrous that it would be impossible to draw a pen-picture of the life-forms of that age. The world, both on land and sea, must surely have been one vast battle-ground for the giants then existing.

Monsters of fearful aspect and gigantic size, seen neither before nor since, swarmed upon earth. Their skeletons, which are still found, include the diplodocus. These when full-grown were 80 feet long. There is one at the South Kensington Natural History Museum.

And from bones and other remains discovered, some of the dinosaurs are judged to have measured 150 to 180 feet in length. They must have consumed tons of vegetation per day to sustain and nourish their great bulk.

Among the denizens of the air we have the pterodactyl, a flying monstrosity best described as half bird and half reptile, with membraneous wings and terrible snapping jaws armed with strong teeth.

The sea, however, swarmed with still more amazing colossi, and within its depths were horrors beside which the most hideous of nightmares pales into insignificance. Here were ferocious sea-lizards—half fish and half lizard—with eyes 14 inches in diameter, and crocodile-like jaws armed with over 200 great teeth, enormous crustaceans, 6 or 8 feet long, shell-fish (many over a ton in weight), ganoid (i.e. bright enamelled or armour-plated) fishes, and colossal sharks and rays. In these latter we have the first of the true fishes, boneless, but with vertebræ, and as the sharks and rays existed then, so in the present age, with little modification, they still remain.

In the fact that to-day, swarming in tropical waters, are rays (or sea-bats) up to 2 tons or more in weight, sharks, some of them over 30 feet in length, and saw-fish to my knowledge weighing up to $2\frac{3}{4}$ tons and over 30 feet in length, we have living evidence that the fish life of the Mesozoic period still exists in the ocean.

During my years of research work in the Caribbean and Pacific I have discovered the following living witnesses dating back to a dim and distant period: sea-scorpions, half an inch to 9 inches in length, awaiting their prey in holes within coral formations; sea-centipedes—lovely creatures to look at, their bodies a delicate shade of salmon-pink, fringed on either side with dozens of legs of purest white (the many I have found ranged in length from three-quarters of an inch to 10 inches). Loathsome sea-cucumbers and sea-slugs, sea-squirts, sea-eggs, sea-spiders, and huge sea-fleas, some 2 inches

in length, are collectively actual evidence that in the depths of the ocean the Mesozoic age still continues.

This combination of data when pieced together compels the deduction that links of the greatest importance in the chain of evolution are here awaiting discovery.

I have endeavoured to show that the life of millions of years ago undoubtedly still exists in the ocean, and as evidence I have given proofs ranging from sea-centipedes and sea-scorpions to great sharks, rays, and saw-fish of tremendous bulk.

I now proceed to strengthen the case that a marine dinosaur may yet remain. Among marine mammals in the tropical waters of the Caribbean and Pacific you find the manatee, or sea-cow—great beasts, in some instances larger than the domestic cow. Here frequently you may see male, female, and young peacefully browsing on the sea-grasses in 6 to 10 feet of water, their heads periodically appearing above the surface to breathe or blow.

In January 1922 a huge whale entered the harbour of Cristobal, Panama, and being unable to find its way out, commenced an investigation of its own, endeavouring to pass up the Canal towards the first locks at Gatun and becoming an actual menace to shipping. Arriving in shallow waters, it ultimately had to be despatched with machine guns. After it was killed it was towed by tugs to the Cristobal Docks and an endeavour was made to raise it from the water, as it would be valuable commercially for oil, etc. The powerful 75-ton cranes and an engine of the Panama railroad were attached to its bulk by steel cables, but its colossal size defied all efforts to raise it from the water. It measured no less than 98 feet in length and was estimated to weigh nearly 100 tons.

What to do with a giant of this description then became a serious question. Tugs were again employed to tow the carcase through the harbour and out to sea, but it drifted ashore some miles down the coast where

there happened to be a native village. The terrible heat causing rapid decomposition, the natives were compelled to leave their homes and appealed to the Government to remove the pestilential bulk that was polluting the air. Once more the tugs had to tow it out to sea, and the United States Army planes from the Panama Canal zone decided to bomb it from the air and blow it to pieces. At Santa Isabel, near Nombre de Dios, sixty miles down the coast, portions of the vertebræ again came ashore: these I was able to recover, and have presented them to the South Kensington Museum of Natural History.

It is necessary that one should bear in mind that this colossus was not a fish, but a mammal, and so here we have the definite evidence of creatures 98 feet in length, weighing roughly 100 tons, still living.

For years I had suspected that, apart from the whale, manatee, and other monsters, gigantic life yet remained in the depths, and my experience in 1920 off Manzanillo, in the Central American waters of the Pacific, confirmed the suspicion. In connection with what here occurred a paragraph from the *Field*, written by my friend Mr. H. T. Sheringham, Angling Editor of that well-known paper, may be quoted:

"We fancy that Mr. Mitchell Hedges has before this been in touch with the great unknown, so he is prepared for anything that may happen. We have heard him relate some of his experiences of the immovable object, and the irresistible force, not in opposition, but weirdly combined in some creature of the depths."

On that occasion I will only say that as I was fishing with a very large hook attached to a steel chain, which in turn was connected to a thick manilla hemp rope, something seized the bait, and proceeded comparatively slowly seaward, but with overwhelming strength, bursting the rope when the end was reached. It was then I knew that there were monsters beneath the waters of the Seven Seas of which Science knew nothing.

I fully expected, in relating this before certain people

who are justly considered great experts, that it would be received with scepticism, but was surprised to find their views coincided with my own. The great public, however, I knew perfectly well would only smile and re-iterate tales about the sea-serpent ; but all scepticism and incredulity are swept aside when we realise the actual fact that in November 1921, off Cape May, a great beast was washed ashore. This mammal, whose weight was estimated at over 15 tons, which—to give a comparison of size—is almost as large as five fully grown elephants, was visited by many scientists, who were unable to place it, and positively stated that nothing yet known to Science could in any way compare with it.

The photographs which were published in many newspapers showed that this modern leviathan somewhat resembled the elephant—in fact, it could best be described as a sea-elephant, but of huge proportions.

I venture to believe, therefore, that this collective array of data must convince the greatest sceptic that beyond all question great beasts of the Mesozoic period still exist in the ocean. Water-beasts of prey beyond the imagination are waiting discovery and investigation, and I feel convinced that it is beneath the surface of the mighty ocean that startling discoveries will be made, to the great enrichment and advance of Science.

It has been my good fortune to have captured a large number of big fish, and in this book I shall describe the battles with them and the dangers encountered, and will give details from personal experiences of the fishing and the exploration and investigation of sea-life in known and unknown waters, and will show pictures of strange creatures of which the general public have hitherto had little knowledge.

CHAPTER II

THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE GREAT ADVENTURE

IN the summer of 1921, mainly through the great kindness and public spirit of the friend to whom I have paid grateful tribute at the beginning of my book, I was enabled to undertake an ambitious programme of two years' deep-sea exploration work.

The first and foremost consideration was, naturally, my outfit. I chose the most complete tackle that ever left this country, and Messrs. Hardy Bros., the well-known fishing-tackle experts, surpassed themselves in building almost super rods and reels, the strength of which was such that human endurance would succumb before either could smash. Messrs. George Farlow & Sons also rendered me considerable assistance; and to Messrs. William Good & Co. I was indebted for the presentation of a series of lines, as used by the Balloon Section of the Army, which proved of invaluable service.

Thus armed, and with a fixed determination to discover what I believed to be unknown, I left Avonmouth on the 12th September, 1921, and proceeded direct to Jamaica. Arrived there, I immediately commenced operations.

After thoroughly testing the sea in the vicinity of Kingston with very little result, I left for Morant Bay, situated at the eastern end of the island. Here again my journey was fruitless. I then went on to Holland, where the fishing was equally unsuccessful; but I was able, by the help of a little colony of natives, to get together a splendid collection of sea-fans, which are to-day on view at the headquarters of the British Sea Anglers' Society at No. 4 Fetter Lane, London, E.C.

Large alligators are still to be found at Holland, but in considerably fewer numbers than formerly. Also here in the marshy land adjoining the lagoon live numbers of very large land-crabs. They are fearsome-looking beasts, their back shells deep blue in colour, some of them, when with claws and legs outstretched, spanning over a foot.

From here I returned to Kingston, and a few days later left for Port Antonio, about sixty miles away.

The drive through the mountains is marvellous, the curves and twists in the road at times quite frightening. Tropical foliage of every description makes a perfect maze ; trees, ferns, and flowers are in riotous profusion ; while in many places, almost sheer down from the road, a river roars over great boulders through miniature cañons.

The day following my arrival at Port Antonio I left at daybreak to fish, and set shark-lines at Williamsfield, and a place two miles farther on called Blue Hole, the name of which suits it perfectly. The blue is intense, caused by the depth of the water. It is a natural sea-basin, almost surrounded by wonderful trees and foliage, masses of maidenhair fern and scarlet hibiscus growing in luxuriance on the steep hillsides rising from the edge of the pool.

I ran two shark-lines out here and left them, returning to Williamsfield, where I caught several conger eels. These tropical congers are very hideous, greenish in colour, and live in holes in the rocks. The *modus operandi* of catching them is to dangle a bait outside these holes—a head suddenly pops out, and the bait is grabbed, and dragged deep within the rocky fortress. It is now a tug-of-war between the fish and its opponent, the fish usually winning. I have sometimes known the struggle last for over an hour. My experience is that one in every ten is caught. They average from about 2 to 6 pounds in weight, but are quite useless for food. It is wise to remember that these fish have tre-

mendously strong jaws, armed with teeth, and may give one the very dickens of a bite if care is not taken when removing the hook.

The next morning I returned to Williamsfield to see if my shark-lines had been productive of results, only to find the lines minus hooks. I then went on to Blue Hole, and on arriving at once saw by the erratic movement of the shark line float that my first big fish was hooked. This fish showed not the slightest fight, and when landed seemed to be in very poor condition; although about 9 feet in length, it only weighed 270 pounds. At the time I thought this a mighty fish. My later experience almost relegated it to the category of a sprat.

I tried for several more days without result, and returned to Kingston by the road which takes the sea-coast through Manchioneal, and was about to leave the island and extend my researches elsewhere, when during an after-dinner chat at the Myrtle Bank Hotel, Mr. H. G. Delisser, C.M.G., and Mr. H. E. Crum Ewing, the Custos of Mandeville, strongly advised me before leaving to try a place called Black River, affirming that there beyond dispute large fish, such as tarpon, red snapper, snook, etc., had been captured.

I must confess I was reluctant to proceed there, the fishing having hitherto proved so disappointing, but I was over-persuaded, and decided to give it a trial. I therefore at once engaged a motor to convey me the hundred miles or so between Kingston and the Black River, and found the journey itself more than interesting.

Leaving on the 26th October, and proceeding by the old Spanish road through Spanish Town and Old Harbour and passing through May Pen, Clarendon, and Porus, after many miles of steep hill-climbing we arrived at Mandeville. This place is situated on the top of an extensive ridge, and after traversing this for about 12 miles, we found ourselves at the summit of the Santa Cruz mountains.

It is doubtful if in any part of the world there is a more wonderful view than that obtained by looking from this great height to the plain below, facing the awe-inspiring seven miles of zigzagging road down which one must proceed. To see the glorious sunset from this spot alone justifies a visit, the colouring of the whole valley being truly exquisite.

Upon reaching the bottom of the hill we experienced reasonably good going, and ultimately, after passing through the little village of Santa Cruz, arrived at Lacovia, where we got the first view of the Black River.

A little farther on by the side of the road are two stone graves, the legend being that a duel was fought, both combatants being killed and buried where they fell. A few miles more and we entered the picturesque little town of Black River, nestling on the shore of the Caribbean, and fortunately I was at once able to obtain quite comfortable accommodation in a bungalow close by the side of the sea.

In the first place I must express my indebtedness to Mr. Mellish, a Justice of the Peace, whom I met there, for much local information, and also for introducing me to a native rejoicing in the name of Abraham Griffiths, who, he assured me, was the person best versed in piscatorial knowledge of the district. With this man I immediately got into touch.

In the tropics I found that the question of clothing is very important, and for anyone to go fishing in conventional dress is ridiculous. After a day of handling bait, and possibly a big fish coming on board, your ordinary clothing would look like nothing on earth when you returned. I will therefore describe the dress which is far and away the best when fishing in climates where the temperature all the year round is over 80 degrees in the shade. This costume is very simple, and the cost practically nil: a white or khaki broad-brimmed cotton or native straw hat, a khaki drill shirt,

shorts of the same material, and a pair of rubber-soled shoes—legs and arms entirely bare. After you have acclimatised yourself to the sun, discard as much clothing as you can. Take the advice of the native in regard to dress—he lives there and knows, and in this way you cannot go far wrong.

On the day following my arrival, half an hour before daybreak, I met Griffiths at an appointed place at the entrance to the Black River. It was one of those marvellous mornings that only the tropics can produce. The beautiful planet Venus had risen in the east over the Santa Cruz mountains ; to the south the Southern Cross was plainly visible ; and above, the blackness of the heavens gave added brilliance to innumerable stars, which in these latitudes appear appreciably nearer to us. It is only at times like these that one realises, what so few of us ordinarily have the desire or inclination to notice, the marvellous beauty of vast illimitable space.

The boats in use in these parts are exclusively dug-outs with accommodation for only three people—really only two in comfort.

Having embarked, I opened the conversation with my native expert.

“ Now, Griffiths, tell me what fish you get here.”

“ All fish, great fish, Backra.”

“ Yes, Griffiths, but what fish ? ”

“ Tarpon, snook, snappers, jack,” he replied, and then proceeded to dilate on the size of these various fish in such a manner that I frankly confess I was incredulous. It seemed inconceivable that up this little river anything like the size he was endeavouring to convey to me could possibly exist, for he affirmed that a red snapper had been caught which weighed over 80 pounds, and that he himself had actually landed a jack weighing over 60 pounds. So many fish stories have been told all over the world, more or less exaggerated, that I—and I am sure most other fishermen—had become extremely sceptical. However, I said nothing, realising that the

only thing was to find out how much truth there was in his statements.

" Well, Griffiths, where shall we go ? "

" Up river, Boss."

I confess I had no faith in " up river," the mouth looking very fishable to me ; but being thoroughly ignorant of the place, I left myself in his hands, and, each of us seizing a paddle, we proceeded to propel the dug-out against the current to a locality which he informed me was known as the Broad Water.

By this time the first faint flush of dawn was appearing in the sky, and it was possible through the miasmic morning mists to see that on the left side the low banks were completely covered with mangroves, while on the right a seemingly endless track of grassy swamp stretched out. This swamp, which covers some 80,000 acres—the largest in Jamaica—is the home of millions of mosquitoes, always the bane of one's existence in the tropics. The light was not sufficiently clear to take in the scenic effects of the country we passed, but after covering about a mile, the river suddenly broadened out, on the left side running up to Lacovia, and on the other branching through the valley towards the Santa Cruz mountains.

As we passed up, I had noticed the whole time curious splashings and sucking noises from the innumerable mud fish and godamie that inhabit the mud flats and tangled masses of mangrove roots.

Paddling softly across the Broad Water, we arrived at a huge water-lily bed, to which we attached our canoe by the simple expedient of reaching down and making use of the stems. Griffiths had spent most of the previous night with a net catching mullet, which are unquestionably the best bait for everything. They averaged in length about 9 to 12 inches, and, incidentally, are very good eating.

I had not brought my great rods and reels with me, and the two I had were almost identical—fairly light, the reels containing 200 yards of line—one of 18 thread,

and the other of 21. I rigged up my tackle, to the end of the line attaching a swivel, 4 feet of steel wire lead, to which in turn was attached a fairly large hook. Cutting one of the mullet through the middle, one portion was impaled upon the hook through the eyes, the other through the tail, and I cast out.

CHAPTER III

THE WONDERS OF THE BLACK RIVER—FOUR-HOUR BATTLE WITH A MIGHTY TARPON

It was now quite light, and I was astonished to see huge tarpon playing and breaking the surface all over the river, while very large numbers of calipever were leaping in the air, jumping in many instances quite 6 to 8 feet above the water, returning with a loud splash. These fish are excellent eating, but almost impossible to catch except with a net.

I was now able to take in the full view of the stretch of water whereon we were moored, the beautiful green of the mangroves, the extraordinary swamps stretching far away, and in the distance stately palm trees here and there lending a peculiarly picturesque effect. While revelling in this virgin beauty, I was violently roused from my reverie by the scream of one of my reels. Raising the rod, which had been placed on the bottom, the end pointing over the side of the dug-out, I struck. There was a wrench of most unexpected violence, and a tremendous swirl of water about 50 yards from the boat. Immediately the taut line became dead slack. I reeled in. There was no question as to what had occurred.

Griffiths was silent, remaining perfectly complacent about the whole incident, as though it was only what he expected. In reality, I think, he was pitying me, or regarding me as a poor fool for attempting to secure the fish he knew inhabited there with what was to him a little piece of cotton. I said nothing, but having reeled in the broken line (it was the 18-thread line) I realised that to fish with two rods was impossible. I

had had my lesson—or thought I had ; but as I laid the discarded rod on the bottom of the dug-out, with a crescendoing shriek the line on my other reel was being ripped off. Again I struck. This time there was no break, and into the air shot 5 feet of gleaming silver. Crash ! water flying in all directions. It returned to its native element, and almost instantaneously once again into the air it sprang, nearly somersaulting ; twice more in quick succession ; then a long, steady rush.

I gave all the butt I dared, and at the end of about 100 yards once more it flashed into the air, scintillating in the sun. It now swung in wide circles, the line whistling through the water ; but this time I was feeling much happier, knowing I had the fish well in hand, and unless the hook pulled from the jaw, which is extremely bony and frail, I realised there was every hope of landing it.

Rush after rush—several times more it sprang from the water, but each time the attempts were more feeble. The circling became narrower, until at last, after a period of nearly 40 minutes, my game opponent was brought carefully alongside the dug-out. Griffiths, gaff in hand, was ready to strike.

“ No, Griffiths, wait ! ” I cried. “ Kneel down in the boat, put your arms carefully underneath, and lift him in. We’ll measure him, and give the poor old chap a chance.”

It sounds a great deal easier than it actually was, but after several vain attempts, still defiant, he was ultimately placed in the bottom of the dug-out, flapping vigorously with his tail, and smothering me with that delightful compound known as fish slime. He was a beautiful fellow, perfectly symmetrical, and when first taken from the water, gloriously coloured. He measured exactly 5 feet 4 inches from tip to tip, and weighed approximately 70 pounds. I gently detached two scales (they make excellent miniature menu holders), then raising him, returned him to the home which I

expect he never thought to see again. Slowly, but I believe happily, he moved away.

I always feel it is senseless to kill when it can be of no possible use or service. Tarpon are really quite useless in the way of food, therefore why indulge in needless slaughter? After all, it is, or should be, primarily the sport that is worth going for, not sheer butchery.

By now the sun had risen well clear of the Santa Cruz mountains, the mists had entirely disappeared; and pulling contentedly at my pipe, that trusty friend that never leaves me, I basked in the heat. I had cast out a fresh bait; half an hour went by, and there was no sign of a strike; tarpon ceased to rise, and even the calipever no longer jumped in the air.

"It's all over for this morning, Griffiths."

"Yes, Boss," he answered; so, breaking the lily stems holding the dug-out, we leisurely drifted down stream.

Along the bank adjoining the mangroves were large patches of glorious mauve water hyacinths opening to the sun. Some of these beds had become detached, and were sailing down the stream, beautiful islands of mauve and green, to be swallowed up and shattered by the sea a mile below. Blue cranes lazily flew among the mangrove trees, humming birds flitted among the hyacinths, while the harsh notes of the crab catcher frequently jarred the silence of the heavy, scent-laden atmosphere, and into one's blood crept the wonderful peace that is only experienced in the tropics.

Where the Black River Bridge crosses the stream we tied our dug-out, and I walked through the little town back to the house where I was staying, as hungry as a hunter, and did full justice to the breakfast awaiting me. In the evening I went up the river to the Broad Water, but although tarpon and calipever were playing all round, I did not experience a single strike.

The following day, again before dawn, I met Griffiths

at the mouth of the river and fished the same locality ; but though we also tried in the evening, there was no result, so next morning, when once more I arrived to have another shot, I said :

" Look here, Griffiths, I know the Broad Water has plenty of tarpon, but they are dead off feed ; let's try the mouth."

A hundred yards out from where the river enters the sea, a sand-bar has formed. The water here is only about 4 or 5 feet deep, but the entire bottom of the river-channel to the bar is full of logwood snags, Black River being one of the largest export towns for logwood in the island, and as for generations in the loading of the trade schooners a certain amount has fallen from the docks, at once sinking (for logwood will not float), the river is full of logs and roots. Here, close to the sand-bar we moored our dug-out by dropping over a heavy stone attached to a rope.

Fishing with a mullet bait I cast out my line, and within half an hour had three runs in succession, but on striking felt not the slightest resistance, though the bait had disappeared. A lull followed—when suddenly, without warning, a gigantic gleaming mass shot into the air 30 yards from the stern of the dug-out.

" Good God ! Griffiths, what——"

I got no further. With a scream yard after yard of line was being ripped off the reel. Mechanically I grasped the rod, for the moment too paralysed to strike, though this proved to be needless. Again the mighty bulk shot into the air. Griffiths was so excited that in response to my agonised appeals to get our mooring-stone up, he almost fell overboard.

With both thumbs on the leather drag I was putting all the strain I dared on the line, and the friction was so terrific with the rate it was being torn off as almost to burn through the leather.

" Paddle, paddle ! " I shouted, though I feared it was useless, as only a few more feet remained on the spool—when suddenly, at the very entrance to the river, the

big fish seemed to hesitate, doubling back, then dashing to right and left. Once again it shot into the air within a few yards of the shore, and with Griffiths paddling his hardest, I was enabled to regain 30 or 40 yards of line.

By this time several of the natives in Black River, having seen this huge fish leaping, had become imbued with the wildest enthusiasm, and their shouts quickly brought almost the entire population of the town down to the river, where they packed the bridge and wharfs.

The fish now definitely decided what to do, and with a rush proceeded straight up stream. Under the bridge we went, Griffiths using the paddle like a madman, while the natives roared words of encouragement to us. Every available dug-out, and even one of the big logwood barges moored to the river-side, was soon filled by the natives, who commenced to paddle with us ; and as if to give a display for their benefit, in full view of the people, who by now numbered hundreds, this leviathan once more shot clear of the water over 6 feet into the air, returning with a crash that sent waves and spray flying in every direction.

In this way we proceeded right up to the Broad Water. Here my coloured friends, getting ahead in their dug-outs, and beating the surface, turned the fish, and it proceeded back again towards the mouth. I was giving all the butt I dared, placing a strain on the line that I thought must cause a break at any moment, but it speaks volumes for Messrs. Hardy Bros.' tackle that nothing gave. Right to the mouth of the river the great fish travelled, when again it turned up stream. All work in the town had ceased, and the natives of Black River were now quite beside themselves with excitement, their shrieking and yelling causing pandemonium. The heat and blaze of the sun seemed to me terrific.

"Griffiths," I managed to gasp, "if that fish doesn't give in soon, I shall," for the strain was beginning to

tell on me badly, perspiration pouring down in rivulets.

An hour—two hours—three hours went by, and still this mighty fish showed no signs of exhaustion. By this time I was actually rolling on the seat of the dug-out with fatigue. Aching in every joint, it was almost agony every time I turned the reel in the retrieving of a few yards of line.

The fish travelled six times from the sea to the Broad Water and back, a distance from when I first struck it of over 12 miles, and on its last journey down, when nearly opposite Mr. Farquharson's wharf, it suddenly began to show signs of being played out. As for myself, I was almost *in extremis*; and here I must unhappily record the fact that the largest tarpon I have ever seen, or even dreamt of, at almost its last gasp, with a final roll parted the evidently kinked wire lead, and amidst groans of disappointment from the natives, disappeared. I was too utterly exhausted to speak one word; neither did Griffiths. He paddled the boat to the side of Farquharson's Wharf, where I was in such a condition that it was impossible for me to stand, and I had to be helped out.

Of the many people that saw this mighty fish, not one estimated the weight at less than 250 pounds, Mr. Farquharson giving it as between 250 and 300 pounds, while others were convinced it would have turned the scale at over three hundred.

Unable to walk, I had to drive the half-mile to the place where I was staying, and was stiff and sore for days after.

I was bitterly disappointed, and yet glad in a way that the fish had escaped. What a fighter! He was game to the last, and certainly deserved his freedom. Perhaps we may meet again one day and renew the battle—who knows?

I had no need to speculate further whether there were great fish in Black River of a size that would break all previous records. With this certain knowledge

I made up my mind I would make it my headquarters for my fishing and deep-sea research work in this part of the world.

That night Griffiths came up to see me.

"Boss," said he, "you did all man could. Him greatest fish seen in Black River. They say in town it was duppie (ghost) of man Rodney, him drowned there, and beg you not catch duppies."

"Griffiths," I replied, "that's the liveliest ghost I ever heard of, and now listen. Black River is going to be my headquarters for big-game fishing. I'm leaving to-morrow morning for Kingston to bring down all my tackle, and we'll see what records we can get from the river and sea round here. Get some men at work right away on nets ; I want one 300 yards long, and one smaller for you to catch bait with. I'll be back again within 48 hours, so have everything you possibly can ready for me, and tell the other fishermen I want a constant supply of bait."

■



DUG-OUT TOWED BY BIG TARPON (p. 34).



RECORD RED SNAPPER (p. 41).

Weight, 102½ lb

CHAPTER IV

HOW WE CAUGHT THE GREAT RED SNAPPER

THE following day I went to Kingston as fast as car could take me. On arriving at the Myrtle Bank Hotel I was immediately asked what my luck had been. I related exactly what had occurred, and stated that I had come up to Kingston to get my tackle, and intended making Black River my headquarters ; and the following day, accompanied by that splendid sportswoman, Lady Richmond Brown, I returned, carrying with me the whole of my great fishing outfit.

It is an extraordinary fact that for several subsequent days, although Lady Brown and I fished persistently, not a single strike did we have. It was not until the 7th November, once again at the mouth of the river, I hit into a tarpon, which, when landed, weighed just over 40 pounds, and returning next day in the same place I struck another. This latter fish put up a splendid fight, leaping into the air, circling the dug-out, and on several occasions shooting right beneath the boat. I had to be on the *qui vive* every moment to prevent a break.

It took over three-quarters of an hour before it was finally landed, and weighed nearly 80 pounds.

The whole time I was playing this fish, I had noticed the dorsal fin of a shark, I judged about 7 or 8 feet in length, following the rushes of the fighting tarpon, doubtless in hopeful anticipation.

The 10th November was one of those days which always stand out in the memory—a day that, when old age overtakes one, can always be re-lived as one sits in an arm-chair by the fire with one's memories.

I do not know why, but on this occasion I was consumed with a feeling of ultra-anticipation. I carried with me down to the waiting boat two of the new rods that had been specially built for me by Messrs. Hardy Bros. for my big fishing work—split cane perfectly balanced and comparatively light. The firm in question have since done me the honour of calling this rod after me: the exact description may be found on referring to their catalogue. I had also special reels for these rods, running on ball bearings, with a perfect brake action. On each reel I had 300 yards of 36-thread line. When you are after great fish of unknown weight, the only possible way to capture them, and thus obtain practical knowledge, is to have tackle that will stand considerable strain. It may be a tarpon of 40 pounds, a big jack, a 300- or 400-pound ray, or—as so frequently happens—a shark anything from 6 to 16 feet. It is therefore obvious, in spite of all that may be written to the contrary, that it is useless to fish with 18- or 21-thread line for this sort of work.

On arriving at the mouth of the river, Griffiths was already waiting for me. He greeted me with:

"Boss, I dreamed a dream last night—I dreamed I was tying a hog" (i.e. in this part of the world the hogs have their legs tied, and are carried in this way). "Boss, it is the bestest dream—we get game to-day."

"Good! I have the same feeling."

We put off, and moored the dug-out a hundred yards off shore on the bar.

"A whole mullet to-day, and the biggest you've got—no halves. If we are after big fish, small baits are useless."

I cast out to left and right of the boat, and I had hardly put my second rod down before the line commenced to race off the reel, and with a rush and swirling of water a great fish made with irresistible force straight out to sea. Seventy-five—100—150 yards of line disappeared. All the time I was tightening my brake, which now registered a 40-pound strain, and not making

the slightest difference to this new species of submarine—200—250 yards. I had now increased my pressure up to 60 pounds, and was expecting a smash every minute.

"Good-bye, Griffiths, to all the line. This fish will never stop till it gets to the other side of the Caribbean!"

A terrific jar, and the rod's point straightened with a jerk.

"Damn it! I wonder how much of my line I've lost," I groaned, and reeling in, was thankful to discover that fortunately the parting had occurred just above where the wire leader joined the line. The dangling end showed unmistakably by the fraying for several feet up the sandpapering effects of shark hide, and I knew it was the mighty tail of one of these "tigers of the deep" that had severed my tackle.

Quickly refitting and baiting afresh, I again cast out. Within the space of half an hour I had two more runs, both whoppers; the last voracious creature upon my striking bit completely through the wire 6 inches above the hook.

"We'd the right premonition this morning," I said to Griffiths. "Game are here all right, but not what we expected: a school of sharks has come in, and I'm afraid it will utterly spoil the fishing," for, be it known, on the advent of these savage creatures, all other fish usually leave the vicinity.

A quiet period followed for a space of nearly an hour.

"Boss, the dream I dreamed meant big sharks," said Griffith sorrowfully.

"Yes," I replied, "and I'm afraid we'll not land anything now," for the sun had risen high up by this time, and in the tropics it is only in the early morning and evening that fish feed well.

"We'll give them another half-hour," I said, "and see what happens."

About ten minutes later the line on the right-hand side of the boat was drawn off the reel for a few yards,

and stopped. Expectantly I picked up the rod—again a little run—a fish playing with the bait, I thought. This was repeated three or four times.

"Some little devil chewing the bait off," I said to Griffiths. Suddenly there were three sharp knocks in succession, and then a rapid run; I struck, and felt, by the tremendous wrench, which almost tore the rod out of my hands, that I was fast into a big fish—the little devil had suddenly grown up!

"Reel my other line in, Griffiths," I shouted, "as hard as you can, and up with the mooring stone! We'll follow this one if it takes us all day!!"

Suddenly the rush ceased. I tightened hard on the line—still harder, until it was as taut as a banjo string—it was fast in a logwood snag!

"Damnation! Griffiths, that was no shark, and the brute has snagged me!"

We paddled up over the spot where the line appeared firmly fixed, when by circling all at once it freed.

"It's——" I was about to say "gone," but I never finished my sentence, for the fish was still there, and with a rush was off again.

"Get way on the boat, Griffiths, then let him tow while you steer."

We were now within a few yards of Theodore Levy's Wharf, the owner of which is known for miles round as "Massa Dore."

The inhabitants of Black River, who are great sportsmen, love to see a battle royal, and now crowded on the wharf, shouting and gesticulating; they were most eager to see me land a really big fish.

Turning to the right, my hidden opponent made for the river, and we passed up under the bridge. I knew it was no tarpon, for not once had it even risen to the surface, and its fighting tactics were unlike those of the jack and snook. I could not think what on earth I had hit into.

"What the devil is it?" I asked.

"Him big snapper, Boss."

"Impossible! Snappers don't grow to this size," I replied.

"Him big snapper, Boss," came the imperturbable answer.

"Well, whatever it is, I feel I'm going to land this one."

But over-confidence was nearly my undoing. With a mighty rush the fish made for a tangled mass of mangrove roots growing deep down to the bottom of the river, and it was only the strength of the rod and line that enabled me to turn it when within an ace of disaster.

Up the river we travelled, the fish boring on doggedly, though at no great pace. We were approaching a large lily bed, and here I had to put all the pressure on my tackle I dared to hold the fish away from this danger zone. Suddenly it rose to the surface.

"Great Cæsar's ghost! You're right!" I cried.
"It's a snapper!"

Slowly I manœuvred the beautiful red shape close to the dug-out.

"Get the gaff under his gills. Steady! go easy! and hold on till I can put the rod down and help!" and between us we managed to get into the bottom of the boat what surely must have been a great-grandfather among snappers. There it lay—a magnificent fish. For at least ten minutes I could only gaze upon it, for never could I have believed that a red snapper of this size existed.

Lady Richmond Brown, who on this occasion had had the bad luck not to be with me, had already been informed by the natives that I was fast into a big fish, and following in another canoe, she was able to take a splendid series of photographs. In these one could see the gaffing of the fish, getting it into the dug-out, and the subsequent dragging of it ashore, and again when hauled up over mangrove branches, where its full length was plainly seen.

Its measurements were 58 inches long, 41 inches in girth, head 18 inches long and 35 inches in circumference at base, mouth 15 inches wide, weight 102½ pounds

—a world's record. Its teeth were almost like those of an alligator ; the largest (which I have) were of ivory and nearly 2 inches in length.

What with the excitement and the heat I felt I had earned a rest, and I fear for the remainder of the day my conversation consisted mainly of big snappers and speculations as to what other records this part of the world might yield.

For several days after this we experienced a succession of violent tropical thunderstorms and rain. Only those who have visited the tropics can realise their severity. For hours the thunder and flashes of lightning continued ; the heavens seemed almost to be a colossal reservoir the dam of which had broken, and the Black River coming down in heavy flood put an end to fishing.

There is only one thing to do at these times, and that is to possess your soul in patience and have your tackle in perfect condition : these are the opportunities one must take to see that reels are thoroughly oiled, new wire leaders attached, examine lines, and a host of other things, for carelessness in overlooking details of this sort will always result in the losing of big fish.

An amusing incident in connection with " losing big fish " occurred after a lecture I gave at the Jamaica Institute in Kingston to a crowded hall. In the course of my remarks I confessed that I had, with very few exceptions, always lost the largest fish, and I do not know that I blame the sportsman who wrote a letter to the *Jamaica Gleaner* the following day, saying that after listening to my lecture carefully he was disappointed to hear that apparently my greatest knowledge of big fish had chiefly consisted of misses. I forget the rest, but if memory serves me right he asked me, if I ever managed to land some of these fish and not miss them, to come back and give them another lecture. Something seems to tell me that one day I shall gratify his wishes and return to Jamaica, and again lecture there, this time showing lantern pictures of weird creatures of a size beyond their wildest dreams.



DRAGGING ASHORE BIG RED SNAPPER (p. 42).



237½ LB. SHARK; A RECORD ON ROD AND LINE (p. 46)

I believe in criticism of this sort, for after all it is productive of much good result. It fills a man with a determination to prove his theories and beliefs, and acts as a spur, whereas faint praise rather sickens one.

One of my most cherished beliefs is that impartial, frank criticism is the greatest test of friendship, and lucky are they who possess friends fearless enough to give it. But I am afraid I have rather wandered from my narrative.

For several days after the storms I had lots of sport, but very few fish, one morning having nineteen runs, and in spite of this only landed one—a shark of about 60 pounds. During the next day or two I got several more—nothing much—the best 80 to 90 pounds. Griffiths said :

“ It’s badlucky, so it is.”

On the 20th November, fishing up the river on light tackle, I got a 10-pound snook, and on the 21st a 6-pound bony fish, known locally as “ Jim-o’-wriggle.” These latter are splendid game fish, and put up a magnificent fight on light tackle, leaping from the water and fighting to the very last.

I still continued to fish early each morning the mouth of the river. The sharks had become a perfect nuisance, and I got quite a number on rod and line, weighing from 140 to 150 pounds. They gave splendid sport, and proved an excellent substitute for Müller’s exercises !

On the 25th November about midday the town was shaken by an earthquake. No damage was done, though had it been a quick movement instead of a slow one, the consequences would undoubtedly have been very serious for Jamaica. Many will remember the results of the 1907 earthquake, which devastated Kingston, killing some hundreds of people. There had been several small shocks previous to this one, which I expect upset the fish, for it is a curious and undoubted fact that fish are very susceptible to seismic and climatic disturbances.

CHAPTER V

TWO HUNDRED AND THIRTY-SEVEN AND A HALF POUNDS
LANDED ON ROD AND LINE—THE HORRORS OF THE DEEP
ARE ENCOUNTERED

TOWARDS the end of the first week in December, whilst fishing with me off the mouth of the Black River, Lady Brown struck a good fish. She was using light tackle, baiting with a small live snapper. This fish put up an excellent fight, but when it started to circle close to the boat with that curious movement that cannot be mistaken, I knew it was a jack. In this circling method of fighting the fish is almost on its side, giving tremendous resistance. On its ultimately being brought to the boat, it proved to be in splendid condition, weighing just over 40 pounds.

The following day we landed two more, both between 40 and 45 pounds, and the morning after I hit into a whale of a fish.

Griffiths had previously never seen a rod or reel, but having by now got used to this style of fishing, he knew exactly what to do, and with great celerity raised the mooring stone. This time we did not go up the river, for, racing madly, the big fish made straight out to sea. Fortunately I was fishing with my heavy tackle, and by Griffiths using the paddle with all his strength, I was just able to keep up with the first tremendous rush before the line came to an end on the spool. With occasional helps from the paddle to ease the strain on the line, the big fish now proceeded to tow us. Half an hour went by, and we were still travelling out to sea. I could see the people on the shore waving, and I waved back in return. By this time I had regained over 100

yards of my 300-yard line, and felt more comfortable. I was no longer in doubt as to what I had hit into, for cutting the surface of the water 200 yards ahead was the dorsal fin of a shark steadily proceeding to—heaven knew where, for certainly we didn't! I badly wanted to land the brute, as I knew it would prove to be the largest fish I had ever caught on rod and line; but time passed, and the terrific strain on the muscles, coupled with the heat, was telling on me badly, and there seemed not to be the slightest let-up to the onward movement of the fish.

At last I could stand the strain no longer.

"Griffiths," I said, "come and take the rod and hang on. I'll steer the boat. I'm absolutely done."

With much explanation I gave him some idea of what to do, and he certainly handled the rod splendidly for a first attempt. Over two hours passed before the fish showed signs of exhaustion, and having rested, I again took over the rod from Griffiths, and at last, thoroughly beaten, it was brought alongside. I looked at my ebony companion.

"What the devil are we going to do with it now?" I asked. "We can't get it into the boat, and I'm determined somehow to get it ashore."

Griffiths scratched his woolly head, and then with considerable skill managed to hitch our mooring rope round the shark's tail, dodging the spasmodic thrashing of that powerful member. We now had the fish tied fast to the stern of the dug-out, but it was still very much alive, and threatened every moment to overturn the boat. In fact it came within an ace of doing so, rocking our little craft so badly that we took in a considerable quantity of water, and only the most vigorous baling prevented our submerging. This, however, would not have mattered much, for a dug-out frequently fills and turns over, giving no real cause for anxiety, for being unsinkable, one has only, when immersed, to rock the boat from side to side, getting rid of a considerable amount of water in this way, and then scramble back,

completing the emptying process by baling, usually with a calabash or coco-nut shell.

After much hard work and perseverance we managed to beach the shark exactly opposite where I was living, and Lady Brown took photographs which show the shark, and the rod and reel used in its capture.¹ It weighed 237½ pounds—an ugly brute of the shovel-nose species. This was, as I anticipated, my record fish captured on rod and line.

I made several night excursions after this.

There seems to be an almost universal belief that fish feed best at night. Strangely enough, this has never been my experience, and I have many times gone both up river and out to sea, and have never once been rewarded with a fish; but I can thoroughly recommend to lovers of natural beauty and mysticism a night picnic up a tropical river. It is impossible to picture a more beautiful spectacle than the dignified majesty of a full moon silvering the delicate fronds of the palms and casting weird ghost-shapes on the water. The hum of myriads of insects one can almost imagine to be the far-off strains of an organ, lending a cathedral-like solemnity to the nocturnal peace of primitive nature.

The fishing hereafter was very slow until Christmas, but the antics of one tarpon I struck are worth recording. In size it was a comparatively small fish, but on being hooked it leaped an extraordinary height from the water, with mouth wide open, shaking its head with great vigour. The half-mullet bait flew in one direction, the hook and line in the other, and the fish in a third—all three being in the air together.

On the 22nd December I went to Kingston for Christmas, driving from Black River nearly 20 miles to the railway-station (which has the name of Maggoty). The road follows the Black River for a considerable distance, and 15 miles above the mouth the scenic effects well repay a visit. The river runs between miniature rocky cliffs which extend right down to the edge of the tumb-

¹ Illustration faces page 42.

ling water, wonderful trees, foliage, and maidenhair fern growing in profusion on the sides, with one of the most picturesque small waterfalls I have ever seen.

On arrival I found Kingston, as usual, awfully hot and dusty, with that wretched white dust that powders everything and gives one a beastly bad cough with a sore throat.

It is possible that some day the Government may endeavour to make the road conditions of Kingston a little more sanitary, but I fear this is too much to hope for in my generation.

I returned to Black River on the 30th December. At this time of year the tangerines are at their best, and seldom have I seen more magnificent fruit than one can obtain in the districts of Clarendon, Porus, and Mandeville, and on passing through, I bought 100, and took them with me.

The next day (the 31st) I finished up the year 1921 in splendid style. Fishing about three miles down the coast from Black River, I struck a leopard-ray. It is really most extraordinary the fight this fish can give, and it is necessary to exercise the greatest care in landing him, the long, whip-like tail in the male being fitted with a single spear, and in the female with a double one, situated about a foot from the body. This is their weapon of defence, and anyone unfortunate enough to have this dagger-like weapon pierce their flesh is almost certain to suffer considerably; the wound becomes inflamed, causing great pain, and in many cases I believe the poison produces a species of paralysis.

Within an hour of catching the first fish, I struck another, which I was also successful in landing. Griffiths and I, after much difficulty, managed to get them into the dug-out, and I returned with them to Black River, obtaining an excellent series of photographs, and removing their long whip-like tails as souvenirs. They weighed respectively 75 and 80 pounds. As can be seen from the photographs, they are extraordinary-looking fish, pretty in a way, and yet repulsive.

In the manner described I bade the old year of 1921 farewell, full of hope as to what 1922 might bring me.

I shall always look upon this year as producing the most extraordinary sequence of events that I have ever had happen to me. It was in this year that the exploration of the Chucunaque and San Blas took place, resulting in the discovery of a civilisation, and much scientific data, unknown to any museum or scientist. Those who love tales of primitive adventure, together with stirring incidents, dangers, and hair-breadth escapes, will read Lady Richmond Brown's book, recording the lives and habits of a primitive people, whom Mr. Joyce of the British Museum, Professor Eliot Smith of the University of London, and other recognised authorities, state to be earlier than the Stone and Iron Age.

I shall do my best to record battles with mighty leviathans of the deep and strange monsters living in the depths of the ocean which we encountered during 1922, also grotesque forms of life observed in the Caribbean and Pacific.

I suppose on the first day of a New Year one is always ultra-optimistic, and certain it is that I set out in the highest spirits for my day's work, nor was I disappointed.

I returned down the coast to the spot where I had previously caught my two whip-rays. I had been fishing less than a quarter of an hour when I had my first strike, and, after playing the fish for nearly half an hour, landed another whip-ray of 70 pounds. Within twenty minutes I was fast into another fish, this time bringing to gaff a hammer-head shark 5 feet 3 inches in length. A quiet period followed, when there came a slow, strong pull. I had entirely discarded my light rods and tackle, and now only used the heavy gear. Steadily the line commenced to run through the rod rings. I struck hard, and was surprised to find there was no rush, the fish still proceeding in the same steady, resolute manner. Gradually, I applied the brake,

until the strain must have registered 50 pounds, with no appreciable result, for this extraordinary moving substance still continued its curious motion along the bottom of the sea. I could not conceive what I was fast into, and neither could Griffiths.

"Whatever this is," I said, "we'd better follow it," for I did not seem able to stop this persistent, comparatively slow movement. Then light dawned on me.

"It's another ray," I said, "but a different species." Memories of skate off the Jersey coast drifted back to me, and I remembered vividly the curious door-mat-like feeling of these fish, so detested by the surf anglers when hooked, but this appeared to be far and away larger than anything of this family that I had encountered.

Anyone who has had the misfortune to hook a large skate will know its peculiar action—the resistance by its outspread wings is tremendous, and it takes a great deal of pumping and hard work to get the mass of flesh to the surface.

I was not far off shore, and by applying great pressure on the line stopped the fish from heading farther out to sea. Griffiths gradually manœuvred the dug-out to the beach, where I got out, and played the fish from the shore, and after about an hour beached one of the ugliest brutes I have ever seen. With its dirty brown back, dilating nostrils, raised repulsive eyes, and a long whip tail, this fish was indeed a hideous object, and its appearance did not belie it, for here indeed was one of the most terrible forms of death lurking in the ocean.

It is armed like its prototype, the leopard or whip-ray, with a dagger in the tail, but this is a much more formidable weapon, fashioned of ivory about 9 to 12 inches long, and serrated down the edge like fish-hook barbs. On coming into contact with any object, the tail with this projecting dagger flashes round, and piercing the flesh of its victim, produces a deep puncture, into which a most virulent poison is transmitted. The effect of

this poison is as follows: after being struck, the victim is seized with violent spasms and muscular contraction, the body arches almost rigidly, black blood is vomited, and death ensues within three to six minutes. Two cases of death were recorded comparatively recently from Savanna La Mar, also one from Taboguilla, and my boatman had a friend killed in the manner described. Griffiths therefore views this fish with the utmost loathing and horror.

Having beached the fish, our difficulty now was how to kill it, which was essential before the hook could be removed from the mouth. A large log of wood thrown up by the sea seemed to offer an opportune weapon. Raising this on high, time and again we struck the reptilian-like beast on the head, each time the tail curling over. Ultimately we solved the difficulty by working a log of wood across the tail, thereby preventing it raising up, and then with a long knife severed it from the body together with the poisonous dagger. I was able in this way to measure it and obtain several photographs. It weighed 260 pounds.

The vitality of this creature was marvellous. After I had performed an autopsy upon it and when completely severed, each portion for long after retained considerable signs of life.

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LANDING 260-LB. STING-RAY (p. 50).



DOUBLE DAGGER OF FEMALE RAY (p. 56).

CHAPTER VI

FIGHT WITH A STING-RAY—IN DANGER OF AN AWFUL DEATH

It was the first time I had landed on the coast in this district, and I took the opportunity of exploring the beach. Where coco-nut palms and the sea-grape trees grew close to the water's edge in a beautiful little sandy cove I decided would make an excellent day camping-ground, and that from here I could easily work and examine a big coral reef situated about half a mile from shore. Large fish appeared to be in numbers in this locality, so that it seemed worth while giving the place a thorough trial.

I returned to Black River, bringing with me the long whip tail and dagger for the purpose of preservation, and the following morning before daybreak, accompanied by Lady Richmond Brown, and with the usual camping paraphernalia, we departed for the aforementioned cove. We also carried the big net, which was now completed. This net was 300 yards long and 7 yards deep, the entire length buoyed with cork wood, so that it would drop from the surface of the water to the bottom; two big stones moored it at each end in order to keep it in position.

We arrived at our destination just after daybreak, and landing Lady Brown on the beach, proceeded to lay our net about a hundred yards off shore, the bottom here being covered with sea-grass, food beloved of turtles and sea-cows. By the time we had accomplished this and had returned to the beach, the kettle was boiling and the welcome smell of coffee rose to our nostrils.

I can vouch for the fact that there, in the first rays of the morning sun, breakfast certainly tasted good.

By this time I had become so acclimatised to the sun that my entire clothing often consisted only of shorts and a hat, and I must confess that this costume (or lack of it) is one of the most comfortable I know in the tropics.

Near our camping-ground a point of land ran out towards the coral reef, and here the mangroves were not only growing right down to the sea, but for some distance out into the shallow water, and I spent much time investigating the extraordinary sea-life that existed in this natural home. At some time a considerable storm must have raged on the coast, for carried far up among the mangroves were quantities of shells, and we were able to make a large collection, some of them being of extraordinary shape, colouring, and beauty.¹

The rest of the day we spent wading out to the coral reef, collecting various specimens of coral and sea-shells, and examining the multitudinous variety of crabs inhabiting what can be described as an ichthyical metropolis for the smaller crustacea.

On returning we examined the net, and found two large crawfish entangled in the mesh where it rested on the bottom. They weighed about 6 pounds each. After resetting the net we returned to Black River, leaving our culinary impedimenta behind.

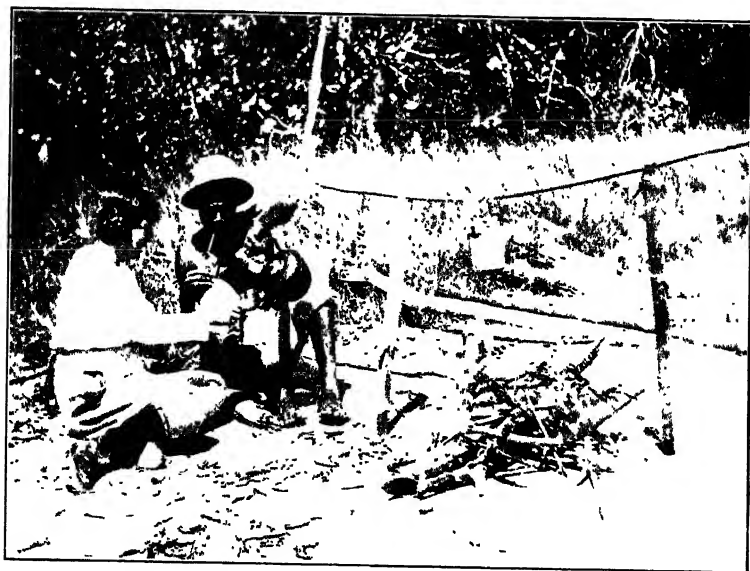
The following morning we again visited this spot and when still some distance off could see, by the clustering in a heap of the cork floats in several places on the surface of the sea, that prey of some description had become enmeshed in the net.

As we approached closer we could observe that every now and then the corks would submerge; something entangled was evidently endeavouring to escape, dragging the net after it, and on coming alongside, we discovered two turtles and a small shark. Griffiths again regaled us with the fact that he knew there would be "game" in the net, as last night he had once more

¹ See photograph at p. 114.



CAMP AT FIVE-TREE COVE AND SOME FINE CRAWFISH (p. 52).



LADY BROWN AND GRIFFITHS AT CAMP AT FIVE-TREE COVE (p. 52).

"dreamed a dream." This time he had "dreamed" of yellow—to dream of this colour, he gave us to understand, is immensely lucky, hence he was sure there would be "game" in the net.

After considerable trouble we managed to kill the shark, which had bitten and torn the net badly, and then set to work to liberate the turtles from the wad of mesh which they had wrapped round themselves. This took quite a little time. They were both of the green, edible sort, one weighing 40 pounds and the other 102. We had visions of turtle steak and soup for several days to come, and if there is anything more delicious in this world I have yet to discover it.

The net being so badly torn, we decided to take it back to the village to be mended; but on raising it, a considerably greater weight than the net immediately became apparent. On hauling it in we discovered no less than five conks, which in crawling along the bottom had become enmeshed, and six crawfish. These latter are excellent eating. Personally I think they are better than the English lobster, and are always a welcome addition to the menu. I should think these must have averaged over 7 pounds each in weight.

As the net would take several hours to mend, we left the cove immediately, and proceeded home, when quite unexpectedly a breeze began to blow strongly in from outside, kicking up a nasty sea, which before we reached Black River was flopping over the sides of the boat, necessitating constant baling. When we arrived we found it very difficult to land, owing to the breaking of the surf, but this was accomplished by jumping out, keeping the dug-out straight, and running it high up on the shore on the top of a wave; and while Griffiths spent the rest of the day repairing the net, I employed myself in thoroughly overhauling my tackle, which I discovered was sadly in need of this attention.

Griffiths arrived early the following morning; this time he had "dreamed a dream" which was "bad-lucky." It had something to do with a mule—I really

forget what it was, but there was no doubt about the bad luck. Owing to the strong inshore breeze it had been impossible to procure any bait, and the net would require several days to mend. There was therefore nothing to do but take it easy.

The following day, however, the sea was like a mill-pond, and bait having been procured, it was decided to go after the big sting-rays once more. I felt most interested in the habits of these strange fish, which were apparently quite local, their habitation seemingly being where the bottom of the sea was more or less composed of a muddy mixture from which grew masses of sea-grasses. This time I took considerable precautions, realising the extreme danger one had to contend with, and that, after hooking one of these fish, it had ultimately to be brought alongside the dug-out ; therefore I carried a .45 Colt automatic in my belt.

Arriving on the fishing-ground, the sea was still without a ripple, and looking down through the brilliantly clear water I noticed a number of conk-shells. They appeared to be of two distinct species, one much larger than the other, and differing in shape. In performing the autopsy on the previous ray I had captured, I noticed the mouth was entirely without teeth, but fitted with immensely strong crushers.

On the Jersey coast the Channel bass follow in behind the big rollers, and as the surf turns up the sand, disclosing large clams on the bottom, they dive down, and take the shell-fish in its entirety within their mouths, crushing it up, spitting out the shell, and devouring the pulpy substance within. Recollecting the feeding habits of these fish, the idea came to me that the sting-ray might similarly feed on the conks here.

I determined to try the conks for bait, and slipping over the side of the dug-out, dived to the bottom, and gathered half a dozen. We took them ashore, and smashing the shells, extracted the mollusc within. We then paddled about 200 yards out, and dropped our mooring stone. Using the whole for a bait (they weigh

about half to three-quarters of a pound), I cast out, and within a few minutes off went the line, and on striking I knew I was fast into another of these curious fish. It is remarkable what a tiring business it is fighting these flat brutes on rod and line, and it becomes really a question of endurance. On this occasion it must have been considerably over an hour before I was able to get the creature to the surface, when it immediately commenced to thrash the water with its flappers or wings, lashing continually with its tail. With the utmost care it was slowly manipulated close to the dug-out, when I fired four shots from my automatic through its head. This was followed by one terrific flurry, after which it was perfectly quiet.

We passed a rope through the curious, nostril-like apertures, situated in what may be described as the head, and tied it close up to the stern of the dug-out, and were just going to paddle ashore, towing it behind us, when suddenly it came violently to life. Its whip curled over the stern, and its flappers began to thrash the water in a most alarming way. We thereupon immediately made for the bow of the boat, where we were out of danger, but the thrashing became intensified, acting almost in the fashion of a ship's propeller. Round and round we commenced to circle, while the convulsions of the fish seemed to gain in strength and force every minute. Our little craft was rocking violently, water coming over the sides, and we realised that to be submerged with this death-dealing menace in such close proximity would be a most serious matter, when quite suddenly it ceased, and with a feeling of extreme thankfulness we commenced to paddle shoreward.

During the tedious process of towing the fish had shown no further signs of life, and in the belief that the bullets fired into it had done their work, and that it was now dead, Griffiths, on our grounding on the sand, got the gaff into it for the purpose of dragging it ashore, when again the brute came actively to life. Now indeed we were in danger. To fling it off from the

gaff was almost impossible, as it was close alongside the dug-out in only about a foot or so of water, with its tail stretching underneath the keel. There was only one thing to do, and that was to attack it as best one could. Griffiths, by exerting the whole of his strength, held it still closer to the boat, and seizing this opportunity I was able to plunge the big knife I carried into it time and again, but the minutes seemed hours before it was quiet. Lady Brown, who had meanwhile scrambled ashore, I subsequently discovered had actually managed, with the enthusiasm of the ardent photographer, to take the extraordinary and unique photograph shown, and so far as I am concerned, I sincerely trust there will never be another one taken like it.

This fish (a female) was larger than my previous one, weighing nearly 300 pounds, the tail being armed with a double dagger instead of a single (in this respect resembling the leopard- or whip-ray) which is disclosed in the photograph, taken after the tail had been severed from the body.

I afterwards performed an autopsy on this fish, discovering that the young are born perfect, including the whip-like appendage, though the dagger-shaped weapon is developed after birth.

It is a most extraordinary fact that various members of this species seem to exhibit a remarkable similarity to both bird, reptile, and mammal. These ray are considered by many to be in reality a type of flattened-out shark, but it is a strange fact that their habits are quite different from those of the shark family.

No more fishing was done this day, and we devoted our time to collecting various coral specimens.

I spent the next few days in obtaining a number of the different species of large conks which I had previously discovered living among the grasses at the bottom of the sea, after which we decided to work farther afield; but as Lady Brown and I both went down within a few hours of each other with a mild attack of malaria, this had to be postponed for over a week.



IN DANGER OF AN AWFUL DEATH (p. 56).
Landing 300-lb. sting-ray



40-LB SNOOK. A BEAUTIFUL FISH (p. 61).

CHAPTER VII

OUR NET IS RUINED BY A BIG SHARK—I CATCH A RECORD SNOOK

SOME miles from Black River, in the opposite direction to where we had hitherto been fishing, the land runs out to a point known as Parattee, while a short distance farther on round the bend is the little village of Pedro, and off here, as I shall subsequently relate, we caught our greatest fish. This locality, owing to the sea-breeze getting up every day with unfailing regularity round twelve o'clock, can only be fished during the morning, and as it is some distance from Black River, it entails leaving considerably before daybreak, whilst to arrive there it is necessary to traverse quite a network of coral reefs. Ignorance of the water here would almost certainly entail running on to one of these continual menaces of tropical seas, but there are usually openings where fish of all descriptions and turtles pass through to feed on the sea-grasses growing between the reefs and the shore.

I do not know why, but there always seems to be an intense fascination in exploring and examining these coral beds. What an immense variety of fish, crustacea, etc., make these natural fortresses their home! An entire life could be devoted to research work here alone, and I believe the facts obtained would be of considerable value. From this district we were able to send home crates containing over 4,000 specimens.

To enumerate only a few of the curious fish that inhabit the Caribbean Sea round Jamaica: there are the cow-fish, having a double protuberance in front of the head, almost like miniature horns; the sea-hedgehog

or urchin-fish, which can at will inflate itself up to almost twice the size of a football, the strong quills which cover it then stiffly erect instead of lying perfectly smooth, as when swimming. I was fortunate enough to obtain specimens of these, which are mounted and can be seen at the British Sea Anglers' Society.

Again, you have the blow-fish, which also has the power of inflating itself. It is minus the quills, but has an extremely strong beak-like mouth with which it is able to detach the oysters growing on the mangrove roots and, crushing them up, eat the contents.

I counted here no less than seven varieties of sea-eggs, and an extraordinary-looking jelly-like fish, resembling a hippopotamus; but to describe and enumerate all the strange creatures that dwell in these waters would occupy many volumes.

As far as the fishing was concerned, the first day or two off Parattee proved disappointing in the way of big fish. Lady Brown and Griffiths on light tackle were doing very well, getting miscellaneous baskets of forty or fifty red snappers averaging about a pound—bony fish—and small jack, some of the latter running up to 3 and 4 pounds in weight. Jack of this size are excellent eating, and so are the red snappers—in fact, a 2-pound red snapper can compare favourably with any fish I know. I also had the big net out here, and during this time it yielded more green turtles from 50 to 120 pounds in weight. It is difficult to realise, with the plethora of turtle soup and steaks we had been having (turtle here being worth only fourpence or fivepence a pound), the huge price paid in London and New York by connoisseurs in this delicacy.

A day of reckoning, however, was approaching for the toll we had taken of turtles. It was shortly after this, going out in the early morning to visit the net, that we witnessed an extraordinary sight. The entire 300-yards length of mesh and corks seemed to have converged on the surface into one huge heap, which ever and anon disappeared completely. Evidently

something of a size we had never yet experienced had entered and become entangled, the power and strength of the creature being such that the mooring stones which stretched the net out had been torn from the bottom and almost dragged together.

We approached warily, and on coming close up a terrific agitation of the water took place, and an immense dark shape could plainly be seen hopelessly wound round in virtually the entire length of the net. We saw at once that to attempt any disentanglement would be impossible, and returning to Black River, sought the assistance of three more dug-outs, for we could see that obviously the only way to handle this huge fish was to tow the whole mass *en bloc* back to the village. After considerable difficulty it was secured to the various crafts, and the return commenced.

What with the weight of the dragging net, the bulk of the fish, coupled with its struggles to escape, it was some hours before it was finally beached on the sands close to the mouth of the Black River.

We then discovered it to be a shovel-nose shark—the largest fish we had encountered up to this. It took the whole of the rest of the day to get the brute clear of the tangled mass. It weighed 612 pounds, was 11 feet in length and 6 feet 3 inches in circumference. This fish, like the Port Antonio shark, was in poor condition.

It happened to be market-day in Black River. From all parts of the country natives assemble here with their produce. These people, living up-country, had never seen a fish of anything like these dimensions; the result was that the usual crowd of Black River natives, reinforced by the country contingent, shortly consisted of hundreds of people, who flocked round in the greatest excitement.

On autopsy I found the interior contained nearly 150 pounds of other fish, one being a whip-ray of over 50 pounds, with scarcely a tooth mark on it, having apparently been recently swallowed at one gulp. I

carefully preserved the jaws and vertebræ, and sent the hide to the local tannery ; but the net took days to repair.

While this was being done, I amused myself by fishing the mouth of the Black River, and the very next day on rod and line I struck into another shark, which put up a tremendous fight, taking over an hour and a half before it was finally landed. It proved to be a sand-shark. This species is beautifully symmetrical ; with a pure white belly and black tips to the pectoral fins, it is really quite a handsome fish.

The following day I determined to try for a big jack. Up till now the largest had been round 45 pounds : this was not what I wanted. After the tales with which I had been regaled in regard to the size of these fish obtained here, and on two or three occasions having personally seen very large ones striking and smashing the mullet and bait in all directions, I was convinced of the existence of far larger fish of this species than any I had previously caught.

We were fortunate enough to obtain about twelve small live snappers, which constitute excellent bait, but they must be used alive, a dead bait being utterly useless for the jack here.

Early in the morning, pushing the boat from the bank, and mooring it 10 to 20 yards out in the mouth of the river, we commenced our fishing.

I had four runs in succession, but on striking, not once did I touch the fish, though on each occasion the bait disappeared. It is extraordinary how this happens some days. Again I had a run and this time struck almost as soon as the fish started to move. Simultaneously with my striking, clear of the water jumped a splendidly shaped fish, which I immediately saw was a snook. I soon brought him alongside, and on weighing found the scale turned at 20½ pounds. Being only lightly hooked it was at once replaced in the water. Following this I had three runs hard on top of each other, but I simply could not drive the hook home.

I had now got to my last bait, which, being really too small for the purpose, had not been used before; so casting out the last hope of the morning I waited with considerable keenness to see whether I would be able to land a fish, if a run occurred. Griffiths had "dreamed no dream," so the outlook was neutral. Suddenly I had a quick run and struck sharply. The line whistled in a semicircle, then with considerable rapidity the fish passed right close alongside the boat, making upstream. I checked its endeavours within 40 yards, and after playing carefully, brought alongside the dug-out a really splendid snook, far larger than any I had previously caught, and one which may, I imagine, constitute a record on rod and line. Compared with great rays, sharks, etc., the poundage of this fish may sound small, but for this particular species it was quite abnormal, though I have every reason to believe they grow much larger. It weighed $40\frac{1}{4}$ pounds and was a beautiful fish, the brilliant silver relieved by a long dark stripe along the sides, in a way somewhat resembling the striped bass of the United States Atlantic seaboard.

An excellent series of photographs of the catching and landing of this fish was obtained, and it later proved to be very good eating—not at all coarse, as most large fish of the various species are.

By persistent fishing my records of fish were slowly mounting up, ranging from the $40\frac{1}{4}$ -pound snook to the 612-pound shark, and the knowledge I was enabled to obtain of big-game fishing was proving extremely valuable to me for future occasions.

I had yet, however, to encounter my mightier opponents, but had the conviction that it was only a question of time before this would be achieved.

Having had no luck with the jack at the mouth of the river, I decided to run out towards Pedro, and started early next morning with this object in view; but when close to Parattee Point I so much liked the look of the water where a deep channel ran towards the

shore through a coral reef that I decided to give it a trial.

On dropping the mooring stone we found this was the deepest water we had yet attempted to fish, being between five and six fathoms. I believe premonitions, as in my case, extend to other fishermen as well, and it is certain that on this morning I had a feeling that trouble was brewing. This may possibly have been engendered by the fact that almost simultaneously with our dropping the mooring stone, two large dorsal fins were observed lazily cutting the water within a hundred yards of the boat.

"Griffiths, it looks as if I'm going to get smashed up with sharks."

"So it is, Boss, so it is," replied my ebony sportsman in his curious English.

I had recently received a consignment of strong 54-thread line from Messrs. Hardy Bros., up till now having used nothing heavier than 36. But having seen the friendly (?) fins of his majesty the shark, and judging by the size that these fish must run anything in length from 11 to 13 feet, I removed the whole of my 36-thread line from the reel, substituting for it the 54.

I had just finished changing my tackle when I was startled by a most extraordinary noise within a few yards of the dug-out. Glancing hastily round, I caught a glimpse of two large roundish brown substances submerge in the water, which now boiled furiously above.

"What the devil is that, Griffiths?" I asked.

"Him cow, Backra."

I waited, watching the surface expectantly, when clear of the water, about 20 yards from the dug-out, two heads appeared, expelling air with a curious noise that is indescribable. They were obviously the male and female—immense brutes—I should judge larger than our domestic cow, though I had here better mention that this amphibious mammal has no horns. Slowly they passed through the channel in the reef.

"They're going inside to feed on the sea-grass," I said. "I want to photograph one of them badly. As soon as we can we must stretch the net out here; we may be lucky enough to catch one."

"We will, Boss, we will; and the meat fetches more money than beef." Griffiths evidently visualised a fortune, my photograph being a secondary consideration!

For a long distance we watched them travel up the shore. So absorbing were these creatures that fully half an hour elapsed before I realised that if I was going to do any fishing that morning I had better begin, so impaling a large bait upon the hook, I cast well out in the hope of christening my new line with a record fish.

Now commenced one of those irritating periods known to all fishermen, when small fish will constantly niggle the bait. Time after time I reeled in, to find only skin remaining on the hook.

"Half an hour more," I said, casting out a fresh bait, "and we'll give the fishing here best."

CHAPTER VIII

BATTLE WITH A GIANT RAY

THE rod was placed in the bottom of the boat with the point over the side, and I commenced to fill my pipe, when in the midst of this most necessary operation the reel started to revolve. My hope of a peaceful pipe was nipped in the bud. Raising the rod, I gently felt the moving line, and, slowly applying the brake, struck, but I might just as well have driven my hook into the bed of the ocean for all the give I felt. The run continued—twirling the screw I applied tremendous pressure, when suddenly the fish stopped. Then quite unexpectedly came a violent rush that nearly tore me out of my seat, and only a miracle saved the dug-out from turning turtle. Luckily I was gripping the rod firmly with both hands, otherwise it must have disappeared.

“For God’s sake get that mooring stone up, Griffiths ! I’m into a huge shark ! !”

As soon as the stone left the bottom, we shot ahead in the wake of the great fish ; putting every ounce of strain on the line I dared, I now let the hidden monster tow us. At first I thought I was into a big shark, but now I knew by the motion of the bulk beneath the surface that I had been mistaken. That it was something mighty I early realised, something that only a question of time and endurance would finally conquer, and I reconciled myself to a long-drawn-out battle.

By now the fish had passed completely through the channel and was travelling along the bottom in the

shallower water between the reef and shore ; but, quickly changing its tactics, with a wide circular movement it once again made for the entrance to the open sea, shot through, and commenced to travel down the coast, keeping close to the outer side of the reef. Again it changed its tactics, this time straight out towards the main ocean, and it continued steadily in this way for at least three miles.

Any attempt to play this leviathan in the ordinary way was entirely out of the question—all I could do was to keep an equal pressure on the line, and guard against a possible rapid doubling, or the other hundred-and-one eccentric movements usually employed by a hooked fish.

By this time we were getting very anxious, not knowing how far out we might be towed ; and, remembering the strong breeze which invariably started up at midday, the outlook was far from promising, for I knew that if the fight continued until the sea got up, any chance of landing a monster of this description in choppy water, with waves breaking over our little boat, was infinitesimal. It was therefore an immense relief when the fish slowly performed a large semicircle and commenced to travel towards shore.

By now nearly two hours must have passed, and Griffiths, detaching the leather belt round my waist, in the centre of which is fashioned a strong pocket for taking the butt of the rod, thus relieving some of the strain, fastened it round his own middle, and relieving me of the rod, carried on the fight, whilst I sat in the stern steering the dug-out in the wake of this seemingly inexhaustible creature.

After the first wild dash it had continued working close to the bottom at a moderate pace (totally different from the velocity of the shark), and this now becoming perceptibly slower, I was reasonably certain by its fighting tactics into what I had struck.

" We're into another huge ray ! " I said.

"I think it, Backra, him damned big sea-devil," replied the perspiring Griffiths.

Back in towards the reef the fish was still swimming, heading almost straight for the channel wherein I had originally hooked it, and on arriving close, once more it stopped. It was exactly as if the line was fixed in the coral—neither jerking, pumping, nor jarring the line would apparently dislodge the brute. Had it not every now and then moved a foot or two, I should really have believed we were snagged, but as it was, it was quite obvious the fish was sulking or resting. As a matter of fact, I verily believe it was the latter, for after remaining like this for over half an hour, it suddenly charged once more, apparently as full of vitality as ever, straight through the opening in the reef into the shallow water shorewards. For a long time up and down parallel with the shore, slowly but persistently it swam. Just before its race through the reef channel I had taken over the rod, and now the strain, coupled with the blaze of the sun and heat, was almost past human endurance, nothing but the continued excitement keeping me going. The breeze was now blowing strongly from the sea, but fortunately inside the coral barrier we were not affected by the troubled water without, but I knew by the wind it was past midday, and that we must have been fighting the creature for over four hours. It now resumed its sulking, hugging the bottom after every run of 30 to 40 yards. Persistently we manipulated this strange adversary nearer the shore, where the depth of water beneath us was not more than 5 feet. Sixty yards away from the boat there was suddenly a tremendous smashing and lashing, creating showers of spray and a veritable whirlpool. In the midst of the vortex we could see a thin black tail curling spasmodically.

"My God, Griffiths, it's a giant ray. How on earth we're going to land it beats me!"

"We land him, Boss," cried the thoroughly excited Griffiths. "We land him if stay all night."



LANDING A BIG WHIP RAY (p. 68).



DRAGGING THE LEOPARD-RAY ASHORE (p. 68).

The fish submerged, but ever and anon the black tail appeared above the surface—and slowly we were getting closer to the shore.

Here, just above the tide mark, where the sea-grape and coco-nut trees grow almost to the water's edge, are about five or six thatched native huts—a little isolated colony of native fishermen, eight or ten of whom had for some time been watching the fight. I have always found the men in this part of the world splendid fellows and I knew I could count on their assistance. I felt certain I could beach the fish in shallow water. It was well past 2 o'clock before I finally worked the fish up on the sand close to the beach. The great bulk appeared almost lifeless, being thoroughly played out, and having landed from the boat, I was thankful myself to squat down and rest, meanwhile keeping the line taut. If only there had been a big rise and fall of tide, as in the Pacific, it would have been a simple matter to have left it until the ebb, when I could easily have got my series of photographs, but here, varying only a few inches, the sea remains at the same level year in and year out. I dared not attempt myself—or let others try—to drag the fish up on the beach, owing to the poisonous dagger in the tail—an ever-present source of danger.

How I cursed the fact that I had left my automatic behind. However, two or three of the natives volunteered to go to Black River in their dug-outs and fetch it. Hoisting their curious little sail, with the strong sea-breeze behind them, they passed out of the channel, and rapidly scurried across the rough surface to the village, taking a very short time to reach there. But it was an entirely different story on the return: with the wind dead in their teeth it entailed paddling back virtually the whole distance.

I sat on the beach eagerly awaiting them and hoping the light would remain good for me to get my photographs. It was an hour and three-quarters before they finally arrived, but the sun was still high. I fired six

shots through the brute's head, and then, with an ever-wary eye on the tail, we all waded in, fastened a rope through the nostril-like apertures, and with a "heave ho! all together!" were able to drag it ashore.

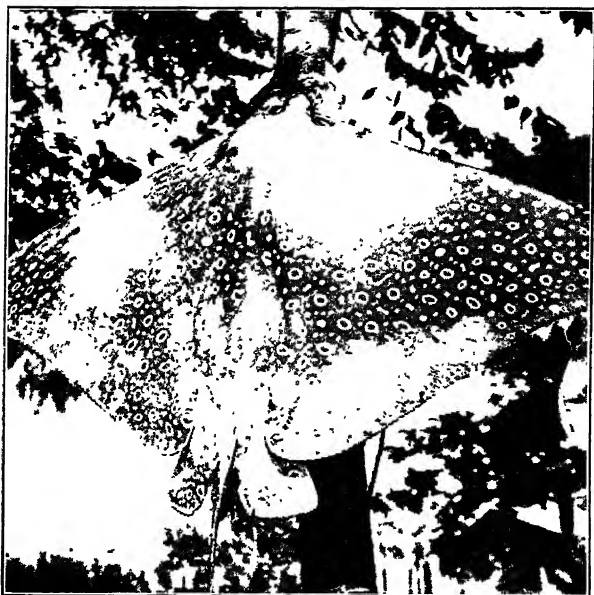
It was a remarkable fish of the leopard- or whip-ray species, the back being covered with white spots, as can be seen in the photographs, of which a splendid series was obtained. This really awe-inspiring brute measured 7 feet 6 inches across the wings, 6 feet 9 inches from head to base of tail, the whip tail from base to tip being 9 feet 6 inches, so the total length from tip of head to tip of tail was 16 feet 3 inches, and its weight 410 pounds. This by a long way broke all my previous records of weight captured on rod and line, my former largest being the shark of 237½ pounds.

Both Griffiths and I were now suffering from the tremendous reaction following our hours of fighting. While the excitement was on we had not realised this, but now we both found our strength at such a low ebb that it was impossible for us to paddle back to Black River, and here again our friends, the native fishermen, came to our assistance, and while we sailed in one of their large dug-outs, our little boat was brought home.

The following day I was so stiff that it was almost painful to move round the room, so I had perforce to remain indoors.

It was a most extraordinary piece of luck that I had changed my 36-thread line to the 54, for it would have been utterly impossible to have played this fish on the finer line.

Reading this through, I realise that it gives a very inadequate description of what a fight with such a great fish is really like. It has to be actually experienced before the amount of physical endurance necessary to stand a strain like this, lasting several hours, can be fully appreciated, especially when the climatic conditions



410-LB. WHIP RAY LANDED ON ROD AND LINE (p. 68).



FRONT VIEW OF WHIP-RAY (p. 68).
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are taken into consideration. All those who have played cricket, tennis, etc., on a very hot day will have some small idea how the blazing sun and heat of the tropics tells on one when the human frame is subjected to strenuous exertions such as have just been described.

CHAPTER IX

WE LAND A BIG BARRACOUDA, AND WITNESS A BATTLE BETWEEN SHARK AND SEA-COW

I TOOK it easy for the next few days, doing no fishing, but making a thorough exploration of the reefs off Parattee Point. This work is a never-ending source of pleasure to me. In the shallow water between this particular reef and the shore, which in no place is deeper than the height of one's shoulders, is the home of some of the largest and most exquisite Queen shells I have ever seen. We were able to add several specimens to our collection, and some curious sea-eggs, quite different from any we had yet come across. These coral reefs with their attendant pools and lagoons are virtually marine gardens, with innumerable gloriously parti-coloured miniature fish, sea-anemones, and perfect coral growths, all of which can plainly be watched beneath the clear water.

I worked from Parattee down the coast, once again meeting the little colony of natives who had helped so valiantly in the capture of the big ray. I found the dark ladies, like their white prototypes, extremely inquisitive. They were very curious to know why I wanted to capture these great fish, which were of no possible use for food and therefore could not be sold in the market. One matron, who was followed everywhere by an astonishing number of offspring, was most solicitous in her enquiries as to whether I had a family. The question of whether I was married or not did not appear to interest her—I don't think she had ever heard of that civilised institution. I told her I hadn't even one child, whereupon she replied: "You poor

thing, we have too many plenty"—which certainly in her case was a self-evident fact.

They were a happy little group, childlike and simple, and I really believe a great deal happier in their perfect freedom than are the vast numbers of people crowded into great cities like London or New York. It is always a surprise to me why so many millions of ultra-gregarious humanity crowd together in the great towns, when there are vast tracts of country still in existence where amidst almost perpetual sunshine, plenty of food, and without much exertion, an ample living can be derived, and where, in comparison to their present lives, they could actually luxuriate.

I always notice on my return to big cities that a species of inertia seems to have crept over people, whereby they have got into a rutted existence, restricting the horizon of their vision to such a small confine that they virtually live and die in the one spot, their knowledge of the rest of the world being almost nil. I am not sure that I could not spend what remains of my life in the tropics; certain it is that whenever I have returned to ultra-civilised countries, before a few months have passed there comes a strong, insistent cry recalling me. Much has been written about the "lure of the tropics," and how those who have lived there are impelled sooner or later to return. I can certainly vouch for the truth of this in my own case, and know several other people who have the same feeling. After all, the amazing futility of modern city life must surely be apparent to all.

To return to our fishing.

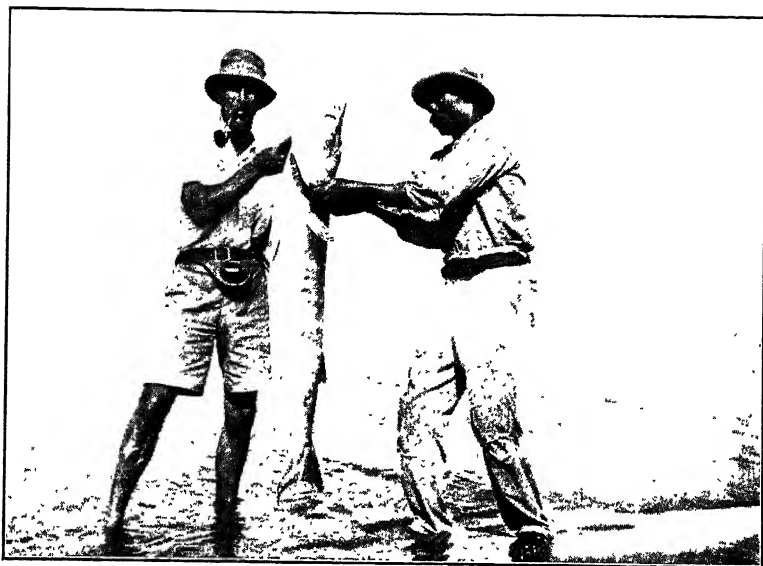
After the few days spent in thoroughly examining these reefs and adding specimens to our collection, accompanied by Lady Richmond Brown, who had been suffering from intermittent attacks of malaria, and had thus been on and off "under the weather," I determined again to fish the entrance of the channel where I had caught my big leopard-ray, but upon arrival found the fishing most disappointing. For over two

hours I waited in vain for a telegraphic transmission up the line, the usual forerunner of a battle-royal, but as there was nothing doing we pulled up the mooring stone and proceeded farther up the coast to beyond Parattee Point.

The big fish were apparently dead off feed, so I sat in the bow pulling away at my pipe, while Lady Brown and Griffiths proceeded to catch a number of small fish, their endeavours being amply rewarded. For the sake of something to do, a small live jack of about half a pound having been brought to the surface, I impaled it on my own hook, and cast out, resuming my drowsy state, to be rudely brought back to earth by the line being torn off the reel with immense rapidity. Plying the brake, I struck hard. Over went the tip of the rod and off rushed a big fish. By the movement under the water I could tell distinctly he was shaking his head like a bulldog, when presently he came to the surface, smashing almost clear of the water. There was no need to speculate what I had on. My luck was certainly in for hooking record fish, for here, making the wildest endeavours to break free, was "some" barracouda. We were not far from the shore, so Griffiths raised the mooring stone and we worked the dug-out on to the beach, from which I proceeded to play the fish. He put up a tremendous fight, but after about half an hour we succeeded in landing him, and I am indebted to Lady Richmond Brown for the excellent series of photographs which she took during the actual playing and landing.

On getting this fine specimen of the species ashore, we found it measured 5 feet 6 inches in length and weighed 66 pounds.

This fish is one of the most ferocious denizens of the ocean, second only to the shark—in fact, there are many that aver it is even more to be feared than the "tiger of the deep." At almost the same time that I caught this one, a tragedy took place at Tampa Bay, Florida, which is described by the *New York American*



5 ft. 6 in. barracouda (p 72)



66-lb. barracouda (p. 72).
THE WOLF OF THE SEA

and provides an instance of the savagery of this species :

" Two girls, named Dorothy McClatchie and Mary Buhner, were swimming round the Channel buoy and were just starting back towards the St. Petersburg Pier, when suddenly there came a rush and a swirl and Miss McClatchie was dragged beneath the water. A searing pain shot through her leg—something had caught her above the knee, and was shaking her as a terrier shakes a rat. The thing was tearing at her, ripping up the inside of her leg to the thigh. A slim shape darted back into the depths, and the water rapidly became reddened all round. The poor girl sobbed out to her friend that something had bitten off her foot. Mary Buhner did all she could to save her friend. She had seen the fish that had attacked, and knew it to be a giant barracouda. As the shark is known as the 'tiger of the deep,' so this fish, because of its ferocity and mercilessness, is called the 'wolf of the seas.' Miss Buhner, with great heroism, stuck to her friend, aiding her in every way possible. A man named George Roe, watching the swimmers through his field-glasses, saw they were in trouble, and, rushing down to the beach, jumped into a boat and went to their assistance ; but although a period of only twenty minutes had elapsed between this terrible creature's attack on Miss McClatchie to the time both girls were rescued and got into the boat, yet on her being raised from the water her heart had stopped beating. So terribly had she been torn by this ferocious creature that she had bled to death. At the hospital the doctors found the femoral artery had been severed in the thigh. The wound extended from the knee along the inside of the leg. There were two deep gashes clean as knife-cuts above the knee. Between the gashes on both sides of the leg were ragged cuts from the upper and lower jaws of the 'sea-wolf' that had killed this poor girl."

I had no compunction in riding the sea of this merciless creature. The jaws, which are fitted with teeth of

almost razor-like sharpness, and the entire skull, I have carefully preserved and brought back with me.

After this exciting episode we returned to Black River. Our net was at last once more in perfect condition after the enmeshing of the 612-pound shark. It had to have whole sections put in, which took a lot of time, and now we left for Parattee to lay it, in the hopes of catching one of the big sea-cows. A long time was occupied in finding a suitable place for this, as it was necessary that the net should be clear of all coral formations, so we did no fishing, and decided to walk the few miles between here and Black River along the sandy shore, Griffiths returning in the dug-out.

Down the beach some native fishermen were busily engaged in seining. This method consists in running a long net out from the beach in a circle, three or four natives then hauling each end, dragging it ashore. It is fitted with a big bag in the centre, and when brought up, it is astonishing to find what a heterogeneous collection of sea-life is contained in the mesh-bag. We watched this operation for some time—bony fish, snappers, jacks, very large prawns, two big crawfish, and an immense amount of fry were amongst them. These hundreds of little fry are collected by the natives and when cooked in a pan exactly resemble whitebait. They presented us with a basketful of really magnificent prawns, which are excellent not only from a culinary point of view, but also make good bait for small red snapper, jack, etc.

Early next morning we proceeded to see what game the net held for us, and sure enough, before we reached it, we knew that something large had become entangled, and I was surprised to find an enormous turtle enmeshed. Again I had recourse to my little colony of natives, for we at once saw that it would be impossible for us to disentangle and get this big creature into our dug-out. It was really most pathetic the way its head kept coming out of the water and blowing—almost like great sighs, as if pleading for its release. Aided by two more boats,



ENORMOUS GREEN TURTLE CAUGHT IN OUR NET (p. 75).



"IT WADDLED AWAY WITH LADY BROWN ON ITS BACK" (p 75).

we moved the net and turtle in one huge tangled heap to the beach. He—or rather she—was a splendid fellow! and again I got some excellent pictures. I persuaded Lady Brown to get on its back, and Griffiths and I both holding it, she was able to get across it. I had turned it facing the sea, and knowing the habits of these creatures, I felt reasonably certain that as soon as we let it go it would make for the water. We suddenly released our hold, and sure enough away it waddled, Lady Brown holding on like grim death. I was able to get an excellent photograph of her in this position, which quite made up for the very bad half-hour she subsequently gave me for playing such a trick on her, Griffiths meanwhile smiling and advising me to "Be smooth and say nothing!"

Something pathetic about this turtle made me feel so sorry for her that I could not bear the thought of having her killed, although the natives considered it a crime that I should let her go; but in spite of their protestations I decided to give the poor thing her liberty. I am sure she had a family somewhere that would miss her, so off she flopped into the water, and I could almost swear she emitted sighs of thankfulness.

We now collected the net, put it in the dug-out, and returned.

That evening we witnessed one of the most glorious sunsets ever seen; and it was followed next day by an even more beautiful sunrise. As we left with our net to relay it, it is almost impossible to portray the beauty of this tropical morning. Above the mountain barrier in the east the dawn broke with the sky changing to duck green. Slowly pink streamers radiated across the heavens, and as the day rushed upon us, it was possible to appreciate the full grandeur. Picture the mysterious Caribbean, royal blue, changing to every shade of green as it neared the coral reef 200 yards from the silver-sanded shore. To the horizon in every direction, as far as the eye could reach, glorious perfections of nature were revealed, calm and serene. But how deceptive!

For hideously cruel is this apparently peaceful nature—so relentless that instinctively one recoils with horror. Watch! see how this restful scene can be shattered by cruelty almost beyond imagination. The day had fully dawned, and arriving off Parattee Point, we laid our net, and proceeded to shore, where we lit a fire and prepared the breakfast we had brought with us. Lying there we noticed the surface of the sea beyond the reef rippled with mullet—fish from about 1 to 2 pounds disporting themselves in the water. Suddenly there was a rush—a perfect burst of foam, followed by many others. Now the booming and smashing could be plainly heard from shore, as a shoal of cavalli jack from 40 to 100 pounds in weight dashed among the inoffensive mullet, tearing and rending them in every direction. What a slaughter! The butchery had fairly commenced. Innumerable sea-hawks and pelicans diving into the water now joined in the destruction of lesser life. The surface of the sea became alive with swarms of small fish darting and leaping in every direction, in the vain hope of escaping annihilation. I jumped to my feet and, seizing my glasses, looked seaward. Yes, what I had been expecting was at hand! There, cutting the surface of the water, I could see the huge dorsal fin of a shark—the “tiger of the deep,” the lord and master of marine life. The monster arrived with incredible speed. The jack were still feeding on the mullet, unsuspecting danger. A frightful convulsion shattered the surface—an 80-pound jack burst into the air. Futile! Unerringly the enormous jaws of the shark seized their victim. In all directions fish great and small tore across the surface. The sea-hawks and pelicans hovered overhead—then stillness; only the mighty fin passed backwards and forwards above the water.

Three hundred yards to leeward, stretching out to sea, was my turtle net, and I watched with concern the passage of the shark, for I knew from bitter experience what would happen. If the great fish struck it and became entangled, nothing could save the net from being

torn to pieces. Whilst I was still watching anxiously, a large oily patch suddenly rose to the surface between the shark and where my net was set. The seconds passed slowly—an elongated brown head appeared—a hissing gurgles—and into the air like steam a fine spray was blown. The head submerged and a gigantic brown body rose up.

“Ye gods, a sea-cow!” I yelled to my native boatman. Bring my rifle!” Running hard, he fetched the .303 with half a dozen expanding bullets. Again the head appeared, and simultaneously the dorsal fin of the shark changed its course, and leisurely moved in the same direction. It gathered speed. The mammal once more emerged to blow and at that moment perceived its inveterate enemy. Immediately giving up its lazy wallowing, it became, as it were, electrically vitalised. The water boiled and swirled as the unwieldy beast rushed headlong through the depths from the attack. One could follow by the oily slick and bubbles the terror-stricken sea-cow (far larger than any land-cow) desperately endeavouring to evade the torpedo-shaped colossus now hard in pursuit. Look! the dorsal fin of the shark cut the water at express speed. Straight for my net pursued and pursuer tore—then the inevitable. As the sea-cow struck the net a great bulge appeared towards the centre. A second later, as the merciless fish’s mighty bulk was also hurled against the obstruction, the entire line of corks which supported the top part of the net on the surface disappeared. The buoys at each end, to which were attached stones each weighing over a hundredweight, drew in towards one another, and now I witnessed a truly amazing spectacle. On the surface appeared an enormous wad of mesh with the two great bodies entangled, struggling, rending, and tearing in every direction. The sea in the immediate vicinity seethed and billowed and was for a considerable distance churned into bloody foam. At times it would seem that the bodies of the assailants in one great tangled mass almost left the water. There was

a frightful ingurgitation and flying spume. The net burst asunder, the manilla-hemp top rope being bitten completely through by the shark's great jaws, and on the surface the corks appeared again in hopeless confusion. Turning I found my faithful henchman standing behind me. We looked at one another. His ebony countenance was convulsed with rage, and certainly I felt much the same. In his excitement his usual English entirely deserted him, and he relapsed into the vernacular.

"Backra, you should a get 'im, Sah! we hab fi get im, we hab fi get 'im, Sah!"

"Damn the shark, and all his species!" I replied. "There's the confounded net ruined again; it will take quite a week before it can possibly be used. We'll bring the shark-lines out here, Griffiths, and see if we can't land the devil that's caused us all this trouble"—and land him, or one like him, on this spot we ultimately did.

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CHAPTER X

WE ARE AVENGED AND PROVE THE TALES OF MIGHTY
JACK ARE TRUE

WE gathered together the net, or rather the remains of it, and on bringing it ashore saw at once that its condition was hopeless, so ripped away the whole of the mesh, leaving only the top rope and corks. For the last week or two several of the natives had been engaged in making a new one of even stronger material, and it was on the point of completion, all but the corks, so now one had only to attach the old corks to the new net.

On returning to Black River I spent the whole of the next day rigging up shark-lines, and several of the fishermen going out to their pots managed to get me a dozen good-sized fish, consisting of jack, yellow-tail, and rock-fish, weighing about 5 or 6 pounds each.

Before sunrise next morning Griffiths paddled the dug-out from our old mooring place at the mouth of the river, beaching the boat on the sands opposite where I was living, and between us we carried the whole of our gear down. It was quite an imposing array, and consisted of an empty 50-gallon oil-drum, six round pieces of wood 4 or 5 feet long and about 9 inches in diameter, three coils of three-eighth-inch manilla rope, shark-hooks, chains, bait, and a lump of iron weighing from 75 to 80 pounds. When the whole of this had been stowed in the little craft there was scarcely room for us to creep in.

Off we went with very little freeboard, and with much care reached Parattee Point without capsizing, which I had been momentarily expecting during our journey.

On reaching our destination we ran inshore and there landed all the tackle, attaching the hooks and chains to the lines.

(I must explain for the benefit of those who are not *au fait* with shark fishing that 6 feet of chain is absolutely necessary next to the hook, as a shark will easily sever any rope I know with one single snap of its jaws.)

This having been done, we attached the mass of iron to the 50-gallon oil-drum and proceeded to sea with it. Arriving outside the reef we dropped the iron and drum overboard. We then returned to shore, baited all three shark-hooks with an entire fish, and proceeded once more out to our buoy. These lines were about 75 yards in length, and 18 feet above each bait we attached one of our wooden logs. The purpose of this is that the bait may float instead of resting on the bottom. Twenty-five yards beyond this another log was attached, and then we securely fastened all three to the drum, with one line running straight out from it, and the other two to right and left. To each roll of wood suspending the bait we tied a piece of thin line with a stone, dropping this to the bottom, thus keeping the bait hanging in one place and preventing the lot drifting together and becoming entangled. Having finished this operation we returned to the beach to await developments.

This day the sea in the vicinity seemed to be devoid of all life—very different from what it had been on our last visit; but from experience I have many times discovered that the absence of signs of life on the surface does not necessarily mean that the fish are not there. The hours passed and nothing happened, Griffiths giving it as his opinion that the bait was too fresh, and that sharks prefer to feed on food that is more or less in a state of decomposition. Strangely enough this seems to be the opinion of most fishermen, but from my actual experience of catching hundreds of sharks in various parts of the world, I can positively state that it is quite a fallacy. Sharks prefer fresh food—the fresher the better. I have had many ocular demon-

strations when using putrid bait, of these fish coming up, nosing it, and deliberately turning away, refusing to feed. I told Griffiths this, but I am quite certain he was unconvinced. Be this as it may, nothing moved the floats.

This method of fishing for sharks with a drum and lines is one of the most deadly I know. When the shark strikes the bait, down goes the first roll of wood suspending it. This is followed by the second roll, which is used for a double purpose, one being to buoy the line on the surface, and the other to offer resistance to the strike. Then the full force of the fish's rush is borne by the 50-gallon oil-drum. The resistance of this against submergence is very great, always pulling against the fish's struggles, and certain it is that a fish once hooked cannot endure for long the tremendous strain of the empty drum, which being moored to the bottom by a heavy mass of iron, can certainly not be moved far, even by the largest fish. Thus it is merely a question of time, no matter how big the creature may be, before it becomes quite played out.

The day passed without the slightest sign of a strike, so leaving the lines out, we returned, hoping for better luck next day. However, when we arrived the following morning, there were still no signs of life, neither had the baits been disturbed, the rolls of wood and drum being in exactly the same position as we had left them. Removing the stale fish from the hooks, I impaled fresh bait, which I had been able to procure, and sat down to possess my soul in patience, for fishing is indeed a game where this is a most necessary virtue.

It was during the middle of breakfast that I descried, just above the surface of the water, the top of a shark's dorsal fin, accompanied by a strong ripple.

"Look! look! Griffiths—away to the right. Here it comes!"

We watched expectantly; the fish, by its uncertainty of movement, had not seen the bait, but was nosing in the direction of our lines. It must have travelled

about 50 yards farther, when suddenly it disappeared altogether.

"Him gone, boss, I think it," said Griffiths.

"Wait a bit!—wait a bit! he's seen the bait, and gone down for it," I replied, and sure enough, with a plop the right-hand float shot down, to be immediately followed by the second one up the line. Then came a tremendous tug on the drum, which disappeared altogether, bobbing back almost immediately to the surface. Once more it jerked under, and this time we could actually see that the drum, its anchor, and entire gear, were being dragged along by this mighty fish. All reappeared suddenly—the two wooden logs, racing along the top of the water, crossed the other lines, the three becoming hopelessly entangled. This did not really matter, but added buoyancy, the other logs helping to play the fish.

What a fight the brute put up! Its strength was really amazing. It is only when one sees a fight like this that one realises how physically puny man is in comparison to these voracious creatures. Built for speed and strength, and shaped like a torpedo, the shark has justly earned its title of "tiger of the deep."

It must have been quite an hour before the plunging, bobbing oil-drum became less agitated, but it was fully another hour before we proceeded in the dug-out to commence the operation of getting the brute ashore—no easy task, for it was impossible to detach the line it was on from the drum, without removing all three. So entwined were they that they had all virtually become twisted in one. However, we managed to fix them to the stern of the dug-out, and commenced an endeavour to tow the inert mass to the beach, for the shark appeared quite dead. This was much easier said than done: the bulk had sunk to the bottom and could only be moved by inches. When we arrived in a depth of water well above our waists, we got out and commenced to haul by brute strength, finding this much easier. Slowly but surely we got the fish into such shallow water that the

whole of its length was now exposed, its back being above the surface, but beyond this we could not move it. Becoming freed from the buoyancy of the water, it was now a dead weight, and I knew it would require at least seven or eight people to drag it up on the sand.

Not the slightest movement had this fish made since we detached the lines from the drum, and now as it lay there it appeared—and I believe was—devoid of life, the tremendous resistance of the empty drum having completely played it out, and most probably drowned it ; for, as is well known to fishermen, if the handling is done in the right way, it is always possible to drown a fish.

I was particularly anxious to obtain photographs, but there was nothing to do but return down the coast to my old friends, the little colony of fishermen, and enlist their help. When we arrived there and explained our predicament, these jolly sportsmen wanted no persuasion, for the shark to them is a *bête noir*. I believe that any power of hatred of which they are capable is concentrated on these creatures. Virtually the whole lot turned out in high spirits to haul their inveterate enemy up on the beach, and this we ultimately accomplished. From tip to tip it measured 12 feet 7 inches in length, with a girth of 7 feet 6 inches, and weighed 920 pounds—once more one of the shovel-nosed species. I opened it up carefully, examining the interior for disease, etc., but found it perfectly clean. The stomach, or gut, contained a large amount of fish in various stages of digestion, which must have weighed at least 300 pounds. I removed the vertebræ and jaws, which—like all my others—I have carefully preserved, and I obtained excellent photographs. The carcase, with help, was then towed out to sea and sunk on the spot where we had captured it.

I thought this might bait the ground up and attract others, and determined to try again ; but bad weather during the next day or two prevented.

For a change I returned to the fishing down the coast

in the old spot where I had got my sting-rays. I took my new net with me, and here christened it. There is no doubt that this locality is the home of these horrible rays, for I had not been fishing with my heavy rod for more than half an hour when I was fast into another of these hideous creatures. The usual tug-of-war followed. It was about the same size as my previous ones, and once more I removed the tail with the poison dagger attached. These tails, etc., will be distributed among various museums and angling societies.

The first time we used the new net, we took an extraordinary collection of sea-life—seven crawfish (two of which weighed over 8 pounds each), three or four very large conks, a turtle of nearly 50 pounds, and on raising the net, we found that where it had rested on the bottom it had become entangled with several pieces of coral. They were of exquisite beauty, far finer than any specimens I had been able to get, and these we carefully preserved.

That night, about nine o'clock, I was surprised when Griffiths arrived in a state of great excitement. It was a most unusual thing for him. Up before daybreak, he went to sleep about sundown. Without warning he fairly burst forth with the following information :

" Him here, Boss, him here."

" What's here ? " I asked, thoroughly mystified.

" Great cavalli jack," he answered. " I see them with my eyes smashing mullet at river mouth."

This was good news to me, for I had been longing to catch a really record jack. I had heard much about these fish and the tremendous fight they put up, but, as previously recorded, had only caught them up to about 45 pounds, and had yet to be convinced that they weighed as much as 60 pounds.

" Right ! " I said to him. " To-morrow morning before daybreak I'll be down at the boat. Get some fishermen to go out with the nets, and catch all the live snappers you can, about 8 to 12 inches in length."

" So it shall, Boss, so it shall ! "—Griffiths's English

always becomes horribly mixed when excited—and off he went. I immediately turned in, full of anticipation for the morrow.

It must have been at least an hour before daybreak when Griffiths wakened me. I had all kinds of awful premonitions, chiefly that no bait had been obtained, as by sheer cussedness almost invariably happens when big fish come in, but this time he was the harbinger of good news. I do not believe he had been to bed all night, so determined was he to get the small live snappers; and he had brought the boat round on to the beach facing the house. In a few minutes I was dressed and down.

He explained to me that he was most anxious that we should have the boat moored in the chosen spot at the river's mouth before daybreak. The big jack go in schools, and one has to await their arrival, but it is necessary to be right in the path or channel where they travel. It is remarkable how they seem to have a regular fixed feeding-time—early in the morning, and from five o'clock in the evening until sundown.

Armed with rods and reels (the latter containing 400 yards of 24-thread line), wire leaders and hooks in proportion, I made my way down to the boat (I did not take my heavy rods and tackle, not anticipating anything bigger at the outside than 60 pounds), and paddled the half-mile down to the river's mouth, where we picked up the bait box containing the live bait, attaching it to the stern of the dug-out, towing it behind us. About 20 yards seaward from the shore and in the centre of the channel we moored, and waited for the first flush of dawn. No sign of a fish broke the surface of the water. As the light became stronger a few mullet appeared disporting themselves, and just before the sun rose, with a tremendous burst of spray, the largest jack I had ever seen smashed at one of the mullet. Using only one rod, I cast out a 10-inch snapper, and could feel by the movement on my line how well it was working. Not five minutes had elapsed

He was in magnificent condition, and measured 50 inches in length, 32 inches in girth, and weighed 64 pounds. The photographs show the somewhat elliptical shape of the fish, and also the large bony head. I consider that when grown to this size they are quite unfit for food, though the natives apparently differ from me, as there was much rejoicing among them when it was cut up and distributed. Griffiths, who shares my opinion of its edible qualities, remarked: "Poor creatures know no better, they must be pitied." The flesh is dark red, and much more like the colour of venison than fish.



ANOTHER STING-RAY LANDED (p 84).



GAFFING 64-LB. JACK (p. 88).

CHAPTER XI

BATTLE WITH A RECORD JACK—THE TRAGEDY IN KINGSTON HARBOUR

THE weather for some days following this turned quite rough, making fishing at the mouth of the river out of the question, which was a great nuisance, so we took the opportunity to make a number of excursions inland. The more I see of Jamaica, the more I feel that her names of "Jewel of the Caribbean" and "Queen of the Antilles" are well deserved. Though Cuba, Hayti, Porto Rico, and other places have their interesting features, I do not think that for tropical beauty and exquisite colouring they can in any way compare with Jamaica.

During these windy days I visited quite a number of places in the vicinity, all of them having their especial scenic characteristics.

On the 12th February I was once more able to go after the jack, and got one fish the size of which I had hitherto looked upon as quite abnormal.

The next day the inshore breeze again blew strongly ; I went out in the boat, but had to return almost immediately. As it was, we were very nearly swamped ; but the following day the conditions were perfect, and fortunately an ample supply of live bait had been accumulated.

Some time previously I had ordered a large wire cage to be constructed, about 8 or 9 feet square, and keeping this in the sea, I was able to save my bait alive for days. Taking a dozen small red snappers with us, and leaving early, we started in earnest after the jack. I fished in the morning up to 9 o'clock without getting a

single touch, and resumed again round 4.30 the same afternoon. With my first cast I struck a good fish, but in the middle of his rush he broke clear, the line fouling one of the logwood snags. These obstructions were causing me a great deal of trouble. I found the live bait working along the bottom frequently entangled my line. This always entailed pulling up the mooring stone, and manœuvring above the obstruction until one was able to clear the line, so on this occasion, after having been fouled by the first fish, I attached a cork 4 feet above the live bait, to prevent it working down to the bottom. A quarter of an hour after losing this fish, the cork went down with a plop, and off went the line at a tremendous rate. The big jack always strike the live bait on the run, and immediately on feeling the prick of the hook, their rush becomes intensified. On this occasion I let the fish run about 20 yards, drove the hook hard home, and by the tremendous wrench on the rod I knew I was fast into a big fish.

The strength and fighting power of this jack was quite extraordinary. Although I hit into it about 5 o'clock, it was not until 6.15 that it was finally brought to gaff, when I discovered all my previous jack records broken. It was a magnificent specimen, gleaming silver, and with lovely pale yellow fins and tail. Its length was 55 inches, girth 33 inches, and it turned the scale at 80½ pounds. This was the largest jack that apparently had ever been caught or seen by the fishermen down here ; but, in spite of this fact, I still cherished the belief that they ran up to a much greater weight. After my encounters with the huge tarpon, red snapper, etc., it gave one seriously to think ; and experience convinces me that in virtually all species of fish the size to which they ultimately grow is quite unknown to fishermen and scientists. Not only does this apply to tropical waters, but to the denizens of the seas round the shores of Great Britain, America, etc. For example, when fishing at Looe, off the coast of Cornwall, some years ago, I caught a wrasse of 12¾ pounds, a far larger

specimen than any up to then recorded, proving conclusively that there is much work to be done by the angling fraternity in home waters. And every year fresh records are made with rod and line along the seaboard of the United States of America.

For two or three days following I worked the sea off our little camping-ground at Five Tree Cove, laying the net there, which yielded some fine turtles and crawfish. In this home of the hideous and deadly whip-ray I got another of these reptilian brutes, weighing just over 250 pounds. On all these excursions the camera was busy and the photographs were accumulating and making a most interesting collection.

Returning home on the evening of the day I caught the whip-ray we had a most unpleasant experience. One of the usual terrific thunderstorms which occur on the hills nearly every afternoon had on this day been particularly severe. As we left in the dug-out on our return journey to Black River, a heavy breeze, without the slightest warning, commenced to blow inshore. Within a very few minutes a nasty sea got up, and the wind increasing in strength, one wave, which seemed to be considerably larger than the ordinary, broke clean over the little boat, which immediately sank beneath us. I managed to hold my rod with one hand and the side of the water-logged dug-out with the other, while Griffiths held on to what he could.

By rocking the boat, we freed it from a certain amount of water, and then scrambling back, baled the rest out. Unfortunately, on submerging it turned over, which caused me to lose two excellent knives and some other gear. Fortunately, I saved my rod, and Griffiths saved my '303 Army Service rifle, which I now nearly always carried with me.

These sudden heavy winds must be recognised as one of the usual troubles which are bound to attend fishing and deep-sea work in tropical seas.

I now turned my attention again to the jack, and on

the succeeding days caught several—nothing exciting—38, 40, and 47 pounds.

In spite of this being the dry season, we were treated to another terrific storm, with a rain which only this part of the world can produce. It was as if the whole of the heavens had opened, and, to judge by the leaden masses of cloud, seemed determined to empty themselves as rapidly as possible. Wherever a depression occurred in the ground or street, it immediately became a roaring torrent. So great was the amount of water which fell on this occasion that the sea for half a mile out changed from its accustomed blue to a muddy colour, owing to the tremendous volume pouring into it from the land.

Of course the Black River came down in flood, but fortunately, as this torrential rain lasted only two or three hours, the heavy rush was of short duration. I think this storm must have caused the fish to congregate at the mouth of the river, for certain it is that a day or two afterwards the schools of great jack again made their appearance. This was the signal to be up and doing, and the morning after their arrival we were out early in eager anticipation; yet in spite of the fact that time and again I cast out the most tempting live bait, I was not rewarded by a single strike, though enormous jack were there, every few minutes smashing the surface of the water in all directions after mullet. From before 6 o'clock I fished persistently until nearly 9 o'clock, and my patience was amply rewarded—there came a tremendous smashing and bursting of water almost over the spot where my live bait was working. I was well warned and ready. A terrific wrench on the line! I struck simultaneously, thumbing my leather down hard at the same moment. The top of the rod bent over, creaking under the strain, and the mightiest jack I had ever struck went off at a speed that I dare not venture to estimate.

When fishing for jack I had consistently used my light rod and 24-thread line, but it seemed impossible,

with the awful driving force of this fish, that it could be stopped before the 400 yards on my reel became exhausted.

Griffiths, with great celerity, had pulled up the mooring stone. Had this not been accomplished, there is no question but that good-bye would have been said to fish, line, and heaven knows what else—including one's temper ! As it was, by paddling hard in the wake of the fish, I was enabled to check its mad dash. I had up till now had many fights, but pound for pound for sheer savagery this exceeded anything I had yet hooked, not excepting sharks. I am convinced that every device known in fighting tactics amongst the denizens of the deep was tried by my battling adversary. Plunging circling, rush after rush—I was on tenterhooks every second. Several times he doubled, dashing straight in and past our boat, swimming completely round, and once or twice diving underneath with immense rapidity of motion. For fully an hour there seemed not the slightest abatement of this game creature's powers of vitality, and an hour and a quarter must have elapsed from my first striking it before I had any hope that the result of the battle would lie with me.

Using the utmost care, and ever wary—for be it known that one can never be sure what these fish will do—I conjured up every art I knew to circumvent a break occurring towards the end of the fight and when victory seemed certain.

Over an hour and three-quarters elapsed before, fought to the point of exhaustion, I brought him alongside the dug-out.

"Griffiths, for God's sake don't miss with the gaff—this is the jack of a lifetime ! " I panted, for by now I was well on the road to being played out myself ; but Griffiths made no miss, at the first strike the gaff going well home, and there by the side of the boat, still defiantly slapping with his tail, was a jack of dimensions I had never believed I should set eyes on. I laid the rod in the bottom of the boat and, exercising much

care, between us we got the fish over the side, and paddled back to the shore, where a large number of natives, attracted by the fight, had gathered as usual to see what we were bringing in. The tape gave a length of 59 inches, with a girth of 37 inches.

"I bet you he tips the scale at 100 pounds," I said.

"Sure, Boss, him must," replied this enthusiastic sportsman.

Alas! we were both wrong. Although this giant among jack did not go over 100 pounds, yet I believe it proved by quite a long way to be a record, weighing 98½ pounds. It was as much as both of us could do to hold it up to be photographed. How many times have I been grateful for the perfect light in this part of the world which enabled me to obtain photographic records of big fish!

I preserved the skeleton head, and I am glad I did so, for never again did I hook one approaching this size. Black River was certainly providing me with a variety of sport on rod and line that I had not discovered anywhere else. Although I had fished the much-vaunted Florida waters and many other places, it had remained for Jamaica, so far as I am concerned, to yield many giant fish I had really not believed existed.

Here I am coming nearly to the end of the fishing at Black River, for the inshore breezes commenced to grow steadily stronger day by day. Several times I went up the river to the Broad Water with no result, though the scenery here was a source of never-ending enjoyment to me. My last evening I shall always remember. A logwood barge came down from Lacovia, with nine or ten natives rowing, all chanting a curious melody, in which they harmonised perfectly, adding to the picturesqueness of this Elysian spot. The orchestration of the mosquitoes and insect life commenced. A long dark ripple slowly crossed the river, and I discerned dimly the almost submerged head of an alligator which had left its lair on a nocturnal prowling in its stealthy search for food. The shrieks of night-



64-LB JACK, SHOWING CURIOUS SHAPE (p. 88).



98½ LB. JACK LANDED ON ROD AND LINE (p. 94).

birds and the hoarse guttural croaking of bull-frogs broke my reverie, and as I paddled back it was borne upon me that nature is never asleep. By day and night relentlessly the butchery continues—with all life the greater living on the lesser, the victory being to the strong.

During the first fortnight of March I was compelled to go slow, the fights with these giant fish, coupled with the tropical heat, having strained my heart pretty badly. This entailed a visit to Kingston, where the doctors warned me seriously that I must go easy, so I was perforce compelled to rest, and occupied myself in my research work among the reefs.

On the 14th I made up my mind to leave Black River and sail on the following Monday for Port Limon en route for Panama. We commenced the packing of all our specimens, when, in the middle of it, I received a telegram from Kingston informing me that a tragedy had taken place there. The message was very brief, simply stating that a girl, whilst standing in the water, had had her leg bitten off by a shark.

On the 15th another telegram arrived stating the girl had died in hospital. This was followed by many more telegrams asking me to come up to Kingston immediately and endeavour to rid the harbour of this menace to bathers.

We hastened our packing, and, taking the whole of our baggage, on the 17th bade good-bye to Black River with feelings of much regret.

The little town gave us an excellent send-off, and after catching the train at Maggoty station we were very much surprised to find that wherever we stopped en route many people were assembled to wish me the best of luck in my attempt to catch this lurking and deadly peril.

My trusty henchman, Griffiths, accompanied me, and on the arrival of the train at May Pen I obtained the morning paper, to find it full of accounts of the tragedy, together with the announcement that I was coming

up from Black River specially for the purpose of trying to catch the shark.

It was with feelings of considerable embarrassment that I found, when the train pulled into Kingston, an enormous crowd awaiting my arrival outside the station. At first it seemed as if I would not be able to get through. My old school-friend, Lieutenant J. H. Owen, D.S.C., R.N.R., the harbourmaster, and one of the best sportsmen it has ever been my good fortune to know, together with Mr. Archibald McInnes, the Government and Lloyd's Surveyor, with the help of one or two of the police, managed to steer me through the throng into a waiting motor-car.

On paying a visit to the locality where the tragedy took place, I found the front seething with people, though what they expected to see was beyond me.

I was then given the first authentic details of what had actually happened.

Miss Adelin Lopez, who was not quite 15 years of age, together with a little boy, Tom Bray, were bathing in Kingston Harbour between the Myrtle Bank Hotel and the Yacht Club, in only a few feet of water—in fact Miss Lopez was actually standing in the sea—when suddenly, to their amazement, Mr. Lopez and several people who were close on shore heard a piercing cry of "Father, father!" coming from the direction of the water. Realising that his daughter was in distress, he rushed in, and on lifting her out, was confronted with the dreadful sight that her right leg had been completely severed close to the body. Three doctors arrived on the scene in a very short space of time, but in spite of their medical skill all efforts to save her were unavailing and the poor girl died within twenty-four hours. The little boy who was with her was fortunately not attacked, though naturally terribly frightened.

I have always expounded the theory that a person standing or floating in the water is in far greater danger of being bitten than when swimming. Later on I will

give instances of how big sharks will come right in on a beach after a motionless object.

Colonel Eden Clarke, Inspector-General of the Police, and Lieutenant Harry Owen now rendered most valuable service in the attempt to capture this terrible creature. The constabulary on land cleared the mob from the water-front, and on sea the water police drove off the natives that were assembled in boats, thus leaving an open space ; and without delay, with the help of Lieutenant Owen and my trusty Griffiths, I ran out five empty 50-gallon oil-drums moored to the bottom with lines attached, on the same principle as I related when catching the big shark off Parattee Point.

These were laid on Saturday afternoon, the 18th March, and I baited two with dead dogs, and four with fresh fish called yellow-tail, weighing about 5 or 6 pounds.

Early on Sunday morning messengers came rushing up to the house where I was staying with Lieutenant Owen to say that one of the buoys was violently agitated and that a great fish was hooked. We ran down as fast as we could towards the beach, but long before we reached it we knew by the roar rising that a vast crowd had assembled. Thousands of natives were pouring in from every direction, and it became a matter of virtually fighting through a solid phalanx of people to get there. A few police were doing their utmost to control the people but were overwhelmed by numbers. We managed to reach the water's edge at last, and ultimately, with the aid of a boat, the buoy, which had been moored close to the spot where Miss Lopez had been attacked, was dragged ashore, and at the end of the line, played out, appeared one of the ugliest brutes of the shark species I have ever seen. It was dragged up, and it will give some idea of the immense jaw-power of these creatures when I state that as the big hook was being cleared from the mouth, its jaws closed in a convulsive snap, and subsequently, on its being completely withdrawn, I found that the barb had

been bitten into the steel almost as if it had been welded.

On this big fish being brought to land, the police present were entirely swept aside by the multitude, which now numbered several thousands. Pressing forward, it almost looked as if we would be forced completely into the harbour. There was a small wooden pier jutting out alongside. This also became rapidly packed with natives. Filled to its utmost capacity, it began to show signs of giving way, the planking in several cases cracking and breaking, and as the crowd still surged on to it many were pushed into the water, dropping off the edge like flies. For a time it looked very much as if another tragedy might occur, when fortunately the police were reinforced by a detachment of water police and further sections of the Jamaica constabulary.

Lady Richmond Brown and Mrs. Owen (wife of the harbourmaster), who up to now had been utterly unable to pass through the crush, by dint of hard work on the part of the police eventually had a path cleared for them, so that they might take photographs of the big fish now lying motionless, but as Lady Brown commenced to do this, in spite of the numbers of police employed the crowd again surged forward and we were all actually driven down to the water's edge. Had the police not used their batons trouble would certainly have occurred.

To attempt to move the shark through the solid wall on land was out of the question. The Government boat therefore came in and the carcase was hoisted on board of it, and we embarked from the end of the little jetty, travelling down the harbour with our gruesome occupant to the Water Police Station. Here it was hoisted on a railway truck by a crane and moved into the shed. We were not to be left undisturbed however, for the crowd rushed from the place where the fish had been landed, streaming down Harbour Street and completely surrounding the shed where we

were assembled to perform the autopsy. Here again the police rendered yeomen service and probably prevented the sides from being driven in.

The stomach of the fish was protruding completely from the mouth, and in its struggles—as very often occurs with this species—it had completely emptied its interior.

The autopsy disclosed several singular features which were most interesting. There were three young about a foot in length, quite alive when they were removed, and a considerable number of infertile ova. On removing the backbone, surrounding it for a distance of a foot and a half was a large calcined growth—I think one might safely call it osteoma. This had produced a rigidity of this section, with attendant paralysis, and by destruction of the nerve centres (I merely venture this as a theory) had possibly produced a species of insanity. This fish was quite abnormal: although only 11 feet in length, its girth was 8 feet 6 inches, and it weighed approximately 700 pounds. The logical deduction following the proved condition of this creature would be that it would no longer possess the activity necessary to enable it to capture its normal food—i.e. various fish, and therefore it would probably become a garbage feeder, consuming almost anything that would not entail undue exertion in capture. Apart from the diseased vertebræ, its bulk alone would have precluded any swift motion.

I carefully preserved the backbone, and it has been on view, together with other specimens, at Messrs. Selfridge's, as well as many other places.

When the examination was over, I was again very embarrassed by the exuberant good-will of the people when I left the shed, and I shall always look back on the tribute paid to me by the *Gleaner* newspaper as one of the most pleasant incidents in my life.

At the time I believed this fish to have been the one that attacked and killed Miss Lopez, but Mr. Gerald Abrahams, who lived in the immediate vicinity of the

tragedy, after the capture still cherished the belief that other monsters lurked in the vicinity, and with commendable perseverance continued to bait and put out a shark line, being richly rewarded about a week later by the capture of a large tiger-shark. This, one of the most ferocious inhabitants of the sea, one would certainly not expect to find so far away from the main ocean as where it was caught—high up in Kingston Harbour.

I do not know whether Mr. Abrahams' efforts have been properly appreciated by the people of Kingston, but I should like here to pay him a personal tribute for ridding the waters there of a fish which I venture to state was an actual menace to bathers, and would sooner or later have taken toll of human life, as to my certain knowledge one of these fish, 12 feet 6 inches in length, attacked a man (also standing in the water) off Morro Island, Pacific, about six months later.

In view of the capture of this fish by Mr. Abrahams, I must certainly modify my idea with regard to the fish caught by myself. I believe the length of his shark was over 13 feet, and I would like to remind bathers in Kingston Harbour that there still remain others.



SHARK CAUGHT IN KINGSTON HARBOUR, WITH LITTLE TOM BRAY, WHO WAS WITH MISS LOPEZ WHEN SHE WAS ATTACKED (p. 98).



PORT LIMON, COSTA RICA (p. 100)

CHAPTER XII

WE ARRIVE IN PANAMA—FISHING AT GATUN AND THE CHAGRES RIVER

As it was now impossible to leave for Panama on the Monday as I had intended, we booked our passage for the following week and spent a very pleasant time during the intervening period as the guests of Lieutenant Owen and his wife, and enjoyed several wonderful picnics, one of them being to Lime Cay, a tiny little sand and coral island just off Port Royal, at the entrance to Kingston Harbour. This is the home of innumerable sea-eggs ; it therefore behoves one to be cautious when bathing not to tread on these pestilential creatures, as the needle-like spikes with which they are covered will assuredly break off on piercing the flesh, causing intense pain and inflammation, and may possibly even entail amputation of the foot.

We said good-bye to Jamaica on the 28th March, and to the many friends we had made there.

I would here like to express my gratitude to Mr. Frank Cundall, F.S.A., the Secretary and Librarian of the Institute of Jamaica, for the information and help he was always so willing to give me, including data from the museum of which he was curator—advice which I found invaluable during my fishing and research work round the island.

Our boat, by a coincidence, was the *Bayano*, on which we had travelled out from England.

As I stood and looked at the lovely harbour of Kingston, with its fringed background of palms disappearing, and beyond the bold escarpments of the blue mountains becoming fainter, I then and there registered a vow to

return if possible, for although I had been to Jamaica several times previously, its charm ever appeals to me. What a lovely island ! It should be one of the tourist centres of the world ; and yet I wonder if it is really appreciated, and cannot help comparing its peaceful beauty with the horrible, blatant glare and pandemonium of so many so-called pleasure-resorts much visited by swarms of the *nouveaux riches*.

The run across the Caribbean to Port Limon is not a very lengthy business. On our way we passed Roncador Cay. It is most extraordinary how these little coral reefs and islands suddenly appear in the midst of the ocean. These islands, being only a few feet above the surface of the sea, are quite uninhabitable, but are extensively used in the turtle season by the fishermen from Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Large numbers of the hawk's-bill turtle are captured here whilst passing through the channels in the reef, this species providing the very valuable tortoiseshell used in making toilet sets, combs, and other things.

Roncador, being completely isolated from any other land, and almost in the centre of the shipping route between Costa Rica, Jamaica, etc., is a *bête noir* to mariners. I believe the United States Government placed a light on this island some time ago, the iron skeleton of which remains, but as the lamp was stolen over and over again, the Americans became disgusted and the friendly gleam can no longer be seen at night to warn the mariner.

On the morning of the 30th March we entered the little port of Limon, Costa Rica. It is a quaint little Spanish town, with a really delightfully laid-out plaza, stately palms of various descriptions growing in profusion. The traveller will at once notice the large number of vultures which hop about the streets everywhere. These repulsive-looking birds devour all the carrion they can discover, and are in effect feathered scavengers, thus unquestionably doing much good.

There are one or two beautiful little islands at the

entrance to Limon Harbour and lovers of picturesque scenery should certainly visit them. The long rollers breaking on the rocks, shooting showers of spray into the air, make quite a beautiful picture against the tropical verdure and foliage of the coco-nut palms.

From Limon to San José a railroad passes through valley and mountain scenery, the sight of which will repay a journey. This can be made in luxurious comfort, a rear observation-car being provided on the train. There is also the interest of the capital, which boasts an opera-house probably ranking with the finest in the world.

Much of Costa Rica is still awaiting an intrepid explorer. Several tribes of Indians inhabit the interior—among others the Talamancas, who still retain much of their primitiveness, obtaining fish by shooting them with bows and arrows. The climate in many parts is excellent, people from Panama and Colombia visiting San José to recuperate in its cool air, situated as it is at a considerable elevation above sea-level.

The fishing off Port Limon is considerably hampered by the heavy swell which at nearly all times of the year rolls in, but a certain amount of sport may be obtained by fishing from the United Fruit Company's wooden jetty, red snapper and yellow-tail being chiefly caught, while quite large sharks can also be captured; though I should not especially recommend this section of the Caribbean from an angling point of view. Any research work is also greatly interfered with by the heavy seas.

After spending a short period in the locality, we left for Panama early in April.

Whenever I visit this country, and enter the mighty harbour, I am filled with almost a feeling of awe to think that man could have accomplished anything so stupendous as that of which we here have ocular demonstration. As one goes through the channel entrance between the seemingly endless concrete blocks that comprise the outer wall of the harbour, to the left the

first thing that meets the eye is the long white building of the Washington Hotel. Ships of all nations are here encountered, for indeed it is the great waterway of the world.

Only a short period elapses from the time one enters the harbour till the ship is docked, and it has always been my experience that the United States Customs officials show one most courteous treatment. On this occasion we really had an immense amount of luggage with us, but we passed through very quickly. Our small packages were on a magnificent 6-cylinder Buick car within twenty minutes of docking, and we were soon in our rooms at the Washington Hotel, the heavy trunks and other things, having been collected by the management, following us in a very short time.

The Washington Hotel is certainly a credit to any country, with its terraced walk facing the Caribbean, and fine open-air, salt-water swimming-pool. The rooms are excellent, and a ball is given every Saturday in the ball-room by the Cotillon Club, to which all guests in the hotel are invited. There is only one drawback to living here, and that is the confounded expense—though I am afraid this applies to most hotels wherever one visits. The moderate purse is seriously handicapped by the heavy increase which has taken place since the war in all travel charges.

In Colon I was glad to meet many of my old friends once more, among them Bill Markham, who is justly credited with being one of the best fishermen and sportsmen in that part of the world.

The day following our arrival, at the invitation of the British Consul, Mr. Ewing, and his wife, together with the late Sir Douglas and Lady Hall, who had travelled on the same boat with us, we made a trip down the Chagres River, which I can commend to all visitors to Panama, not only for beauty of scenery, but for many other points of interest, chief among them being the large quantities of parrots, which, assembling in the trees in the afternoon, seem to have their own

jazz-band. It causes much amusement to hear these curious birds creating an almost syncopated melody.

Here in the Chagres, and especially the mouth towards Fort Lorenzo, is the home of mighty fish. It was fishing in this stretch of water that the Prince of Wales, on his visit to Panama, got his first big tarpon ; while many other notabilities, including General Pershing, in spite of their deeds of valour elsewhere, have had the battle of their lives in this district. General Pershing, in fact, after landing his tarpon, dishevelled, with the perspiration pouring down him, and aching in every limb, declared that this was indeed the day of his life.

I wonder if the people in Great Britain really appreciate how the Prince of Wales is beloved in other countries ? In this I do not speak of the British Empire, where, as all know, his popularity is tremendous, but in countries like the United States and Panama. To me, as an Englishman, it is a source of gratification to hear his Royal Highness always referred to as a " damned good sportsman," which I really think is the greatest tribute that can be paid to anyone in the world, for to Britishers the term " sportsman " has always been the finest word in the English language. This one expression embraces every characteristic necessary to constitute a real man, and it is as such that his Royal Highness is regarded abroad. Hence whenever his name is mentioned it is always coupled with expressions of affection and good-will.

A few miles from Colon some excellent sport is reached with the greatest ease. I would unhesitatingly recommend all sportsmen visiting Panama to try this water, and I am sure that my dear friend Dr. Tom Leary, the head of the Government Hospital at Colon, would always be glad to give all information and help possible. He is President of the Panama Tarpon Club, which numbers among its splendid body of men such giants of sport as my friends Bill Markham and Cyril

Fernie. The latter has recently taken up one of the great thrills of life—big-game fishing.

At the foot of the Gatun Spillway is the little Fishing Club-house right on the water. During the dry season, clear as crystal the waters flow over the apron, and in a miniature fall or cataract race into the pool below; and by wading out in the stream where it flows over the concrete bed splendid sport is obtainable. Many times have I fished it with never a blank day, and on my last visit (in March 1923) I saw one rod account in a morning for four tarpon from 18 to 42 pounds in weight, and over thirty snook. Jack, red snapper, and a species of bass can also be captured here.

The records of fish weights which are kept in the club books are most interesting, and register among others a red snapper of 70 pounds, a jack of over 40 pounds, tarpon running near 100 pounds, besides large snook, bass, etc. It is indeed a delightful fishing spot, the natural beauty of the surroundings lending charm.

This pool also is the home of large alligators. Many times have I watched the big shapes all day long slowly crossing and recrossing the pool, and creeping up on the rocky bank only 30 or 40 yards away from where the fishermen were casting their lines.

The tackle universally used by members of the club is a very light rod and 200 yards of 9- to 18-thread line. There are three methods of fishing. The rods used are whippy enough to cast a fly, and it is an extraordinary fact that all the denizens here will take this lure, from tarpon and red snapper to snook. Live baiting (the small fish can generally be procured at the club-house) is also a method much in favour; and the third is quite interesting.

A visit to the Gatun Club-house would not be complete without partaking of a feed of the snook which you must first capture yourself, and if any connoisseur with jaded palate does not find this surpass anything he has ever tasted in the first-class hotels of the world, I shall be very much mistaken. It is indeed an epicurean feast.

After having caught the fish, you clean and gut it in the running water of the Spillway, and as the scales and refuse drift downstream, using a portion of them as bait, you allow your bait to follow. In this way some of the largest fish are caught. On the very light tackle used, any tarpon or red snapper hit into will tax your piscatorial skill to the utmost. I have here witnessed intensely interesting fights with fish lasting over an hour.

Be careful not to slip in the running waters of the Spillway, as several people have lost their lives in this fashion, and there is a considerable amount of danger, which you are liable to forget in the excitement of the battle. It is imperative that you should wear boots with iron spikes.

I must relate a curious fishing incident I witnessed here some time ago. Fishing with my old friend General Sadlier-Jackson, D.S.O., and Bill Markham, the former towards dusk struck a topping fish, which put up a terrific fight. The General had all his work cut out to handle his battling opponent, what with preventing himself from slipping from the apron into the deep water, and guarding against a break in the fine tackle he was using. Rushing and circling round the pool, this virile creature fought. The sun had descended and the swift darkness of the tropics was closing and still the fight went on.

"Aha!" the General cried, "he's coming in—I'll land him yet before it's too dark to see!"

I'll swear that even when leading the British Forces at Murmansk he was not more excited.

He had not, however, reckoned on the cunning of this wily inhabitant, for quite unexpectedly, when the fish was almost played out, its struggles ceased.

"Snagged, by God!—snagged!"

And about 50 yards from where he stood, the line was fast in some obstruction. This had occurred towards the right bank, downstream from where he had been fishing. Running along the side in the fast-

gathering darkness, we could see a big white form slowly moving beneath the water close to a big boulder about 10 yards out.

Without hesitating, one of the other sportsmen present divested himself of his scanty clothing, and, in spite of the alligators, dived in and freed the line, and within a few minutes the General had won what I really think he considered his greatest battle, and brought to gaff a jack of about 35 pounds—no mean feat with a fly rod and 12-thread line.

CHAPTER XIII

FISHING AROUND COLON—I LEAVE FOR UNKNOWN WATERS

A SHORT distance from Colon, and reached by boat, is a large expanse of water known locally as the Lagoon de Tarpon. In this deep circular stretch can still be seen the piles and route of the old railway, built by the French, when originally they were endeavouring to construct the canal and railway. This again is the home of a very large tarpon and red snapper. On almost any evening it is possible to see innumerable dorsal fins and bodies of *Tarpon atlanticus*, but it is another story to catch them. I have not fished this water myself with a dead bait, but I believe some really record-making fish for this part of the world could be obtained here, bottom fishing with a dead mullet 6 to 10 inches in length. Any of the local fishermen could, no doubt, easily procure this bait, and the result should be most interesting.

I also have an idea that the Chagres River towards the mouth at Fort Lorenzo should yield mighty fish if this same method of tempting them was used. Mr. Cyril Fernie has now equipped himself with big-game tackle and I am expecting to hear of great results.

Colon makes a really fine big-game fishing-centre. If one is lucky enough to get a lull in the North-east Trade winds (which make fishing outside the harbour walls almost impossible most times of the year), one can obtain wonderful sport with Spanish mackerel, the fish running up to 10, 12, and even 16 pounds apiece. Inside the harbour itself most excellent sport is to be had, and here the fishing is much easier, owing to the shelter given by the outer concrete barrier.

I feel I must relate an amusing experience that occurred during the war. Bill Markham, fishing with a friend from a small boat close to the Main Steamship Channel, struck a sea-monster of some description. Not knowing what to expect, he was using fairly heavy tackle. Down the channel towards the entrance of the harbour the big fish straightway made. Being war-time, across this entrance as an obstruction for German submarines a Government ship had been moored, armed guards being on board with definite instructions that no craft, large or small, should enter or leave the harbour without a special permit. The orders in regard to this were stringent, with the resultant penalty of being immediately fired on. You may imagine Bill Markham's consternation when straight towards this moored boat the big fish made, the little craft proceeding hard in its wake.

"What shall I do?" yelled Markham. "It's heading straight for the boat!"

"Hang on!" quoth his friend; "I'll steer it underneath the mooring cable."

"If we defy the rules and regulations and pass that boat," said Markham, "there'll be the devil to pay."

"To hell with regulations!" cried his now thoroughly excited friend. However, the "best laid plans of mice and men" went badly "agley," for at the exact moment in which they were attempting to pass underneath the mooring cable, something happened to the steering, and crash into the side of the Government boat they bumped. Immediately there was pandemonium on board—soldiers rushing about on deck, believing that the long-expected submarine had appeared and that they had been struck.

When they looked over the side, saw these two ardent fishermen in their boat, and realised what had caused the sudden panic, I believe the language, from the commanding officer downwards, was simply awful, and it was only the popularity of Bill Markham and

his friends that saved them from being shot at dawn or suffering one of the other terrible penalties.

The fish had broken clear, and the episode ended by our two sportsmen climbing on board, where, I am given to understand, the dry laws of the United States were outraged ; but I do not wish to imply that Bill Markham was guilty of this, for he has only one vice that I know of—I suspect him of prohibitionist tendencies !

Subsequently talking over this incident of striking the big fish, and weighing the pros and cons, the consensus of opinion resolved itself into the belief that it must have been a very large jew-fish, several having been previously caught in the harbour.

Quite recently, fishing from the side of one of the docked liners, the ship's cook struck one of these big fish. He managed to get it to the surface, but the difficulty was to haul it on board. This, however, was solved by several men getting into a small boat, rowing to the side of the vessel, and managing to raise it from the water. It weighed 168 pounds.

I caught one once with a stout hand-line, out on the Pedro Bank, in the Caribbean, that turned the scale at 350 pounds, and I have seen them off the end of the pier at Bowden, Jamaica, weighing considerably more than that. These fish can best be described as a dark and heavily built species of the snapper family, having an enormous mouth and head.

I spent a week or two fishing in the vicinity of Colon, catching various fish, but nothing really worth recording. It was about this time that I was introduced to Major Fitzwilliam. During several conversations he told me that he had spent some time at a place called Mandinga. I must confess that I had not the remotest idea where this was, but subsequently learnt that it was the name of a small bay situated inside a reef in Panamanian territory occupied by a tribe of Indians known as the San Blas. He seemed to know this district very well, also the coast for a distance of about a hundred miles between Colon and Mandinga, and actually owned quite a large

portion of land at Viento Frio—i.e. "Cold Wind"—which was somewhere between Colon and San Blas.

I naturally enquired about the fishing; but he seemed uncertain about this, not being a fisherman; however, he was enthusiastic about the beauty of the country and the extraordinary inhabitants down there.

"You simply must go and see," he said. "Only the outskirts have as yet been visited by a white man, and there are many tiny island villages of which the world has not the slightest knowledge. Who knows what you may encounter fishing in waters that have hitherto certainly never had a line of any sort dropped into them—why, good Lord, man! can you realise that the San Blas Indians are so primitive they use fish spears, and shoot fish with bows and arrows?"

His vivid description fired my imagination to an extraordinary degree, and the upshot of these conversations led to a remarkable sequence of events which must be almost without parallel.

The very thought of vast stretches of water, intersected with innumerable islands, became an overwhelming lure. I pictured heaven knows what within the depths of the channels and off the coral reefs of this virgin part of the world. A day came when, after his again suggesting that I should go there, and informing me that he had a yacht which was exactly the craft necessary for this work, I fell.

"Look here," I said. "What would an expedition lasting a month cost, including stores, guns and ammunition (most necessary for big game, alligators, and the final killing of great fish), gasoline, and crew's wages?"

Rapidly he calculated a round sum, and I asked him to come at 12 o'clock next day, telling him that in the meantime I would discuss the question with Lady Richmond Brown.

The latter, since leaving Jamaica, had been suffering from a recurrence of an internal trouble which had necessitated a very serious operation in England in the

spring of 1921, and I feared that it would be impossible for her to accompany us on a trip whose hardships I fully realised were bound to be considerable. Being closely associated with her in many business affairs, I had serious qualms about leaving her in her present state of health on an expedition from which it was quite possible I might never return. A journey in a little craft, over many miles of sea, in an unchartered archipelago, would obviously necessitate considerable risks.

Discussing every aspect of the matter with her, I found she was enthusiastic that I should make the attempt, and would not hear of my refusing.

"You must go," she said; "I've a premonition that this trip will have great results." And her words were indeed prophetic.

Fitzwilliam kept his appointment punctually and I told him that I would start as soon as he liked. He undertook the commissioning of the boat with every necessity, and without delay I stowed my big-game fishing tackle, guns, etc., safely on board.

On the morning of Thursday, 20th April, we left Colon Dock at daybreak on board the little 20-ton cruiser yacht *Cara*. This splendid little craft was fitted with a 38-h.p. medium-duty standard engine, had excellent cabin accommodation, and was lit throughout with electric light; but having no sail, one was entirely dependent upon the engine.

All those who have visited this part of the world at this time of the year, and the adjacent Republics bordering the Caribbean Sea, know the type of weather which always prevails in April. The North-east Trades blowing strongly without cessation kick up a very rough sea, and to make matters worse, there is never a lull, for they continue day and night, with hardly any variation in force. On this occasion the climatic conditions existing acted fully up to their reputation.

Immediately on leaving the outer harbour of Colon, we commenced to ship big seas, which grew steadily

worse as we continued our journey. We were also running straight into the wind, travelling east-nor'-east. Every few minutes the little yacht performed a species of nose-dive, the propeller leaving the water completely, and although the *Cara's* normal speed was 9 knots, it took just six hours to reach Porto Bello (arriving at 1.30 p.m.), a distance of 22 miles. Three times during this journey we developed engine trouble, mainly owing to stoppage of fuel feed caused by the violent action of the boat. Personally I was thankful when we entered the peace and calm of this remarkable natural harbour.

I was intensely interested in the old town and ruined forts destroyed by the great English pirate Sir Henry Morgan, of which much could be written, but shall confine myself to describing fishing experiences during this expedition.

After we had dropped our anchor, a couple of dug-outs came alongside, and I went ashore in one of them, but, returning to the yacht with little delay, I commenced fishing operations from the dinghy which we carried.

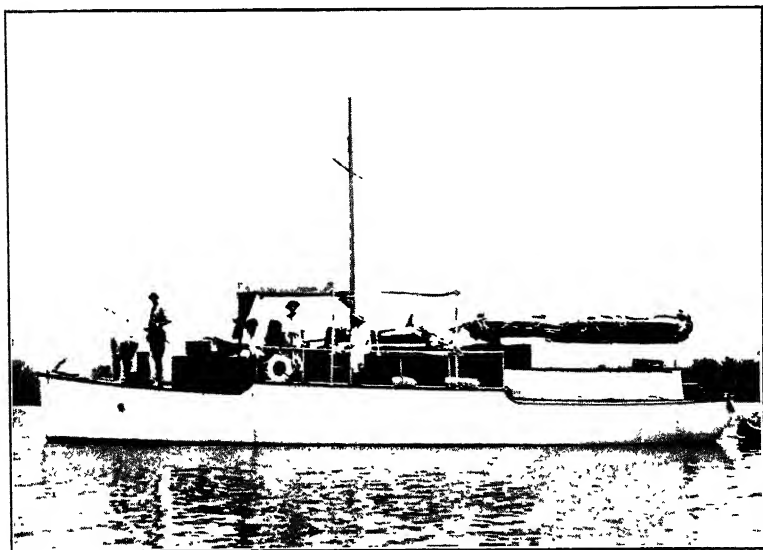
I tried many places in Porto Bello Harbour, and although I am convinced that large fish are to be had, not once did a tell-tale nibble enliven the proceedings.

We remained there that night, leaving the following morning, and after clearing the Sister Cay Islands at the entrance to the harbour, ran into bad weather again. Once more the heavy rolling caused engine trouble and we had to put into Garoti.

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EXAMINING SEA-LIFE AMONG MANGROVES AT FIVE-TREE COVE (p. 52).



"CARA" IN THE SAN BLAS ARCHIPELAGO (p. 128).

CHAPTER XIV

THE SAN BLAS—SECOND JOURNEY TO UNKNOWN WATERS

I SHALL pass over the various ports of call on the journey to the San Blas, as I must deal with these *in toto* when describing a second expedition. Suffice it to say that in the late afternoon of the 24th April we passed through El Porvenir Reef, and went straight on to Mandinga, remaining there for the night. I immediately rigged up my fishing-tackle, using a 36-thread line and an 8-inch Wilson spoon-bait, proposing to troll from the back of the yacht the following morning ; and next day, while proceeding from this anchorage to visit various little islands in the San Blas Archipelago, I hit into my first fish.

I was sitting in rather a precarious position at the extreme end of the boat, the water at the time being calm, as the sea here is cut off from the roaring hell outside by a series of coral reefs, when without warning a tremendous tug came, so nearly pulling me over that it was with the greatest difficulty I managed to hang on to the rod and regain my balance. We were cutting through the water at about 9 knots—the resistance of this, coupled with the weight of the struggling fish, making the playing of it most difficult ; but when the boat stopped in response to my yells, the handling of it became a simpler matter.

It put up a splendid fight, and though not once did it come to the surface and give me a view of it, I knew by the bulldog-like shakes transmitted up the line that I was fast into a barracouda, which proved to be the case when finally landed. This one weighed just over

42 pounds. How I detest these vicious fish, and in this part of the world they are a veritable plague !

I have never bathed in these waters, for what with the barracoudas, sharks, rays, stinging seaweed, and other life which dwells therein, I always felt discretion was the better part of valour, though many times the beautiful limpid clearness of the water was an almost irresistible temptation.

As this was really an exploratory visit for the purpose of obtaining information, I propose only to touch briefly on the ensuing few weeks. Suffice it to say that after a most interesting and highly productive experience, nearly a month later the return journey was commenced.

During this period I had caught many fish—of jack nothing larger than 14 pounds ; of red snapper 22 pounds (my first barracouda of 42 pounds proved to be my largest), Spanish mackerel up to 8 pounds ; but all my fishing had been very hurried, never staying for any length of time in a given place. I had, however, learnt sufficient to know that there were great possibilities awaiting when more time lay at my disposal than I could give on this trip.

My fishing was considerably enlivened when again nearing the El Porvenir Channel. About 6 miles from here, while proceeding at a speed of 9 knots an hour, a large school of porpoises were indulging in their favourite pastime of playing at the sides and bow of the boat. It is curious how these fish love to amuse themselves in this way ; diving and darting beneath the bows, circling under the boat—they always remind me of a pack of hounds.

As usual, I was fishing from the stern, trolling with my spoon-bait, when with a tremendous smash (only the double grip I had prevented my losing everything) the line commenced to tear off the reel at a tremendous rate. Quickly the boat stopped, and now started my first real battle with a big fish on this voyage.

Ye gods ! what a fight ! I had not the faintest idea

into what I had smashed, no fish I had ever struck behaving in a similar fashion. Almost the whole of my line, in spite of the greatest braking strain I dared put on, was torn from the reel before I could check the first rush, and I do not believe this could have been accomplished had not the engine of the boat been reversed, and we proceeded astern in the direction the fish was travelling.

Fighting with the utmost fury, in wide circles, broken ever and again by furious rushes, the strength of this battling denizen of the deep appeared inexhaustible. Many times it seemed impossible that I could ever bring it alongside, and a full hour elapsed before I could even obtain sight of it, when I was astonished to see it was actually a porpoise. As all fishermen probably know, this is a most unusual occurrence—in fact I have only heard of one other case of such a fish hooked and landed. Ultimately, with the greatest care I worked it alongside the yacht.

Then came the question of how to get it up on deck. First it was gaffed and held, while a rope was passed round it, and by all heaving together, it was hoisted up. The photograph shows how this was accomplished. It weighed just over 200 pounds.

Although a very poor taxidermist, I managed to preserve the skin, and subsequently, on my return to Colon, had it mounted as well as local skill could do it.

During the skinning process we had proceeded steadily on our journey, and on gaining the open water, the turmoil of the rollers seemed to me to have considerably abated, possibly because the trade wind was now almost behind us. That evening we put in at a little natural harbour, once more passing through a narrow opening in a reef, and lying snugly close to the land in the calm pool behind.

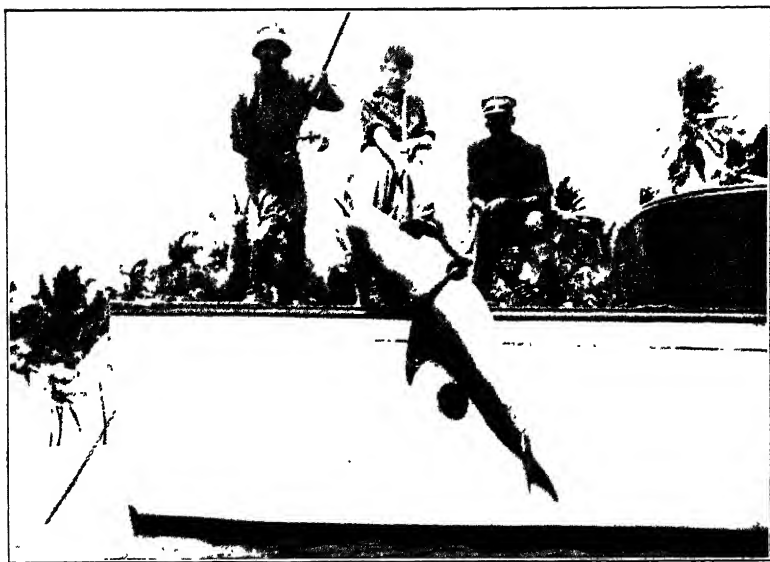
It was here I pitched overboard the carcase of the porpoise. I had been keeping it for the special reason of noting as carefully as possible the feeding habits of the shark, and owing to its considerable fatty com-

position, I surmised it would float. Overboard with a tremendous splash it went, and sure enough, slowly it drifted away, bobbing up and down on the surface. Within a very few minutes two or three swirls of water appeared close to it, and I could plainly see a couple of small sharks, about 3 to 5 feet long, helping themselves to mouthfuls—then, for no apparent reason, they almost simultaneously disappeared, when from the depths a huge bulk hurled itself at the red fleshy mass of the skinned porpoise. There was a frightful ingurgitation of water, and to my astonishment the whole carcase, which certainly must have weighed round 170 pounds, was taken into the great shark's mouth at one gulp.

Both in animal and bird life, as many people have, no doubt, remarked, a curious wagging motion of the tail synchronises with swallowing. The pelican, when feeding, is a good example of it. Lambs suckling and dogs being fed provide the same demonstration in the animal world. The shark proved that in this particular species the tail followed the same motion as that of animal life, for it is a fact that after swallowing what was evidently much to its taste, its tail moved rapidly to and fro.

As the fish remained on the surface for a full minute rolling—one might almost say wallowing—as if from pure enjoyment of the meal just despatched, I was able to observe it closely. I was very glad of the opportunity to gain first-hand information with regard to its feeding habits, for it subsequently proved very useful to me in tackling the great monsters of the Pacific.

On leaving the little port I trolled all the way back to Colon, catching several fish of no great importance as regards size, and ultimately arrived after an absence of nearly a month. I felt that I had gained a great deal of knowledge on this trip, and I brought back with me a large collection of Indian curios, etc. I had several long conversations with Lady Richmond



LANDING 200-LB. PORPOISE AT EL PORVENIR, SAN BLAS (p 117).



FISHING AT GAROTI (p. 121).

Brown, whose health, unfortunately, had not improved during my absence. In my mind was germinating the idea of a really ambitious expedition—no less than an exhaustive examination and exploration of the whole of the San Blas Archipelago, fishing the waters thoroughly, and visiting every Indian village.

Twenty-five miles from the mainland in the same vicinity I had learnt was a group of small islands entirely uninhabited, known to the Indians as Kaymaal, which had hitherto never been visited, so far as I could discover, by any white person, and on this trip I had obtained more or less substantiated evidence of the real existence of a remarkable race a comparatively short distance inland. These were the legendary people of whom tales have been told throughout Central America from time immemorial. It was reputed that some hundreds of years ago the old Spanish Conquistadores attempted a landing here but were unable to effect it owing to the savagery of the natives, and now I was filled with the desire to achieve what seemed almost the impossible.

In the matter of a dangerous expedition into unknown country three things were to be considered :

(1) A boat for the purpose of carrying stores, guns, and the impedimenta necessary for a voyage of this magnitude was an essential.

(2) A moving sleeping-base was another necessity.

(3) To reach a place whence one would endeavour to penetrate inland was out of the question except by sea.

As all those who know Panama well must realise, the country in the direction of the Colombian border is absolutely impenetrable, by reason of its dense jungle, etc.

By one of those curious coincidences which seem to occur at psychological moments in our lives, Major Fitzwilliam was desirous of leaving Panama and returning to the United States for good, and as he could not take his yacht with him he was anxious to dispose of it.

Here was our means of accomplishing the cherished plan, the yacht *Cara* being in every essential suitable for the purpose. As Fitzwilliam wanted to leave immediately, after a short discussion with Lady Brown, the purchase of the boat was agreed on, and we were now able to sail when and wherever we choose.

However, on the eve of starting out for the Great Adventure, Lady Brown's illness suddenly became acute, necessitating her removal to Colon Government Hospital. For days it looked as if another operation was inevitable, but owing to the skill of Dr. Tom Leary, the Chief, it was avoided, though she was obliged to remain there for nearly a month, receiving every possible attention and care. It is indeed with great pleasure that I record the fact that nowhere else could she have had better care and treatment.

Her ambition, though quenched for the moment, was not given up—she was always counting the days before we could leave for our projected exploration. I had many conversations with Dr. Leary, being most anxious to know if her health would stand the strain of an expedition which I knew, from the experience I had already gained, would tax her strength to the utmost, and would occupy an unknown period of weeks, possibly months. He vigorously supported the idea of her going, believing that the sea-voyage would do more for her than any medicine. I made full preparations therefore for the journey, loading up with stores of all descriptions, 600 gallons of gasoline—in fact, everything that I thought would be required.

Here I must explain that one of the greatest essentials was a medicine-chest, the value of which I had found on my previous voyage of discovery, but the chief reason for taking it is given in Lady Brown's amazing book, *My Voyage to the Unknown*. To the Santo Tomas Hospital, His Excellency Dr. Belisario Porras (the President of Panama), and Dr. Eusibio Morales (Minister of Finance) I am indebted for the help they gave me, not only in supplying me with all my medical requirements, but

for active assistance in many ways ; and after a farewell dinner at the Washington Hotel to wish us *bon voyage*, we left to face the dangers of the unknown, followed by the good wishes of our friends and the press in Panama.

At daybreak on Thursday, 22nd June, we started, and encountered some rough seas outside the breakwater, and as upon the previous trip, we put into Porto Bello Harbour. Once more I fished here, though it is true in a perfunctory manner, with the same negligible results, and the next morning, in the deuce of a big sea, we put out.

Owing to the vile weather, which I really believe must continue the whole year round, we only proceeded as far as Garoti. This is a perfectly beautiful natural harbour. Entering through a channel between the rocky barrier, one finds immediately perfect peace, the great seas are left behind, and simultaneously with passing through the reef a placid land-encircled lagoon is discovered. It is easy to see that the mainland here is a solid wall of jungle, which clothes the mountainous hills completely to their summit.

Down went the anchor, and we determined to fish the vicinity. What a beautiful spot ! Here is a perfect silver-sandy beach fringed with palms. Millions of curious minute brown jelly-fish were working close to the shore, their method of propulsion being most peculiar, really beyond description. Close in to the shore jack and small barracouda were smashing the surface and casting the fry right on to the beach. So I obtained my bait in a very short time.

My fishing-costume consisted of only a bathing-suit, for I had now become absolutely sun-tanned and hardened to the fiercest rays of the sun. No matter how great the heat it did not seem to affect me in the slightest.

Using a light rod, 9-thread line, etc., I had some really excellent sport from big boulders which jutted right out into the sea. An hour and a half's fishing produced a bag of 11 red snappers, running from half a pound to a pound and a half ; 14 jack averaging a

pound ; 2 barracoudas weighing four and five pounds respectively, and several other fish.

Towards the end of my fishing I think the parents of the small barracoudas I had caught must have arrived, for three times in succession on striking I was smashed up ; but during the hour and a half I had been at it I enjoyed every minute thoroughly, and, even better still, had a supply of fresh fish for supper.

CHAPTER XV

IN THE MIDST OF THE PRIMITIVE WILDS—THE STRANGE LIFE THEREIN

WE passed the night at Garoti. The thunder of the surf outside, together with the drone of insects, and innumerable curious noises from the various inhabitants of the jungle, brought home more vividly than anything else could have done the fact that we had indeed reached the wilds.

Turning in about 9 o'clock, I seemed to have hardly closed my eyes when I was rudely awakened by the most awful noise. It seemed as if the whole world had gone mad. Sleeping in the cock-pit with the rain-screens dropped round me, I got up, pulled them aside, and was almost blinded by the terrific lightning. The roar of the surf outside seemed to have become intensified. A curious moaning and groaning could be discerned whenever the shattering thunder momentarily ceased. I crept along the deck to the bow, where Robbie, the *Cara's* coloured engineer, and my other native man were hard at work on something.

"What are we in for?" I yelled.

"Great Chuquesana coming," replied the second man, who called himself John George.

I then saw what they were working at. The little dinghy we had with us was brought alongside the bow of the yacht and a second anchor was lowered into it. John George rowed straight ahead as hard as he could, while Robbie played out the chain after him, and about 30 yards away the anchor was dropped into the water from the dinghy, which then returned. They both

hauled hard on the chain, fastening it round the capstan, so we now had a double anchor out.

"What the devil is all this for?" I asked.

"Chuquesana coming, Boss," again replied old John George.

I hadn't the faintest idea what all this meant, but I was not long in doubt. The lightning and thunder were now virtually continuous—in fact, there was no cessation between the flashes, which seemed to be one sheet of electric fluid. As I stood there a puff of wind struck me.

"Hang on, Boss!" shouted Robbie; "here it comes!" And then I experienced for the first time what is possibly the greatest climatic danger one has to contend with in this part of the world. With a howl as if all the fiends of hell had been let loose it rushed on us, and well indeed was it that my two men had had the sense to run out the second anchor, for it is certain that if we had trusted only to one, although under the lee of the island, it would have dragged, and we should have been blown across the lagoon and driven on the opposite shore.

It was a most awe-inspiring sight. The blaze of light, roar of the thunder, and shriek of the wind, combined with the fact that it was night, brought a realisation of how utterly puny we and our little boat were when opposed to the full force of nature in her raging moods. Although it seemed hours, it could not have lasted more than forty-five minutes, and it passed as quickly as it came. The moon shone down, the lagoon and land once again appearing as if nothing had disturbed the serenity of this beautiful spot.

Next day, immediately after breakfast, we continued our journey. Passing through the Isla Grandi Channel, after an hour's sharp run we made Nombre di Dios. Our little cruiser did well—the way she rode the big rollers was wonderful, scarcely ever shipping water. After leaving here we ran between the shore and an extremely dangerous reef, which I believe is known

as Escabanos reef, and about 4 p.m. without mishap threaded the channel at El Porvenir. What a relief it was to slide into smooth water after over ten hours' rolling and pitching in the heavy Caribbean.

"What do you think of this fairy-land?" I said to Lady Richmond Brown. She seemed hardly able to reply. I think the vista of the tiny palm-tree covered islands so far exceeded in beauty anything she had previously seen that she was almost rendered speechless. As for me, I revelled in the thought that here was a limitless expanse of water, that taking one's own time, with no thought of days, weeks, or even months, one could fish at leisure and examine the life which dwelt within its depths.

We dropped anchor in a channel between two of the islands, and here Lady Brown had her first sight of the San Blas Indians.

Without waste of time, still using my light tackle, I started fishing and within a quarter of an hour had landed the first. A supper of fresh fish was always a great treat after the tinned food which was our staple diet.

I caught five or six red snappers that evening, and could, no doubt, have had good sport; but in the morning, away in the distance on the horizon, faintly outlined against the sky, we discerned what seemed to be a small dark smudge.

"Look here," I said, "let's try to make for that place over there. It's almost a certainty it's never been visited before."

Raising the anchor, off we went. For two or three miles the sea was as smooth as glass, and then quite unexpectedly we struck a wicked piece of water. A channel here a mile or two in width opens out to the main sea, and the full force of the Caribbean was roaring through in white crested combers. My God! how we rolled. I bolted below to the little cabin to secure our duffle, etc., which was being flung all over the place. Our little craft, however, weathered the turbulent

passage in splendid style, and shortly the outer reef, with one or two low-lying islands which were almost flush with the water, once more gave us protection. Here in the lee the sea resumed its calm. We had no charts, for the good reason that there are none in existence, and had to trust to luck, coupled with extreme care, in our navigation in these seas. Presently right ahead of us a really beautiful island appeared, considerably larger than the others, but to approach it we had to pass over a very suspicious-looking patch of lightish ground, which appeared perilously near the surface. By going dead slow we managed to cross what we could see, when immediately above it, was a sand-shoal, though we had several anxious moments, as there could not have been more than a few inches of water between our keel and the bottom.

Once over, however, we glided into a translucent pool almost completely protected by tiny reefs and miniature islands. Here we dropped anchor, and within a few minutes I had got several pan-fish—i.e. fish for frying.

The sea, islands, reefs—all appeared to invite exploration, and getting into the dinghy, with John George rowing, we commenced an investigation of the surroundings.

After pulling a short distance, we found the water shallowed to about a foot and a half, and for a mile or so ahead, and a breadth of approximately a quarter of a mile, it hardly varied in depth. Being in our bathing costumes, we stepped over the side of the dinghy, wading about wherever we pleased, and were surprised to find innumerable sponges covering the bottom in every direction. We gathered quite a number, depositing them in the dinghy, together with many shells and other curious specimens, including two new species of sea-eggs.

We then continued our wading to a tiny island, certainly not larger than half an acre, where the ubiquitous palm tree, even on this patch of land,

managed to find sustenance. Eleven sturdy specimens were growing here, affording a grateful shade.

We found several Queen shells, but much smaller ones than those we had discovered in Jamaica off Parattee Point.

While sitting on the sand resting from our exertions we witnessed a most curious sight. Close to the beach here (as at Garoti) into the shallow water rushed a school of jack after the fry. The noise they made could have been heard a hundred yards away. They thrashed and beat the poor little beggars, driving them up on the beach, and I was able to get bait for my fishing by retrieving those that were stranded.

Spending the rest of the day in collecting, by the time we reached the yacht again the little dinghy was nearly full of odds and ends, and, thoroughly tired out, at sundown we turned in, to wake at daybreak and continue our journey. We found, however, that although from a distance the visiting of these outer islands looked quite simple, it was another question when we tried; for we had not gone more than a few miles farther, amidst the maze of sand-shoals, reefs, mud-flats, and islands, before right ahead of us stretched a rocky barrier. Try as we would we could find no opening and at last we had to give in and return. Past the little anchorage where we had spent the previous night, into the roaring hills of water thundering through the channel we went. This time we were not compelled to cross it, for on entering we swung hard to port, running with the heavy sea astern, and into calmer water, anchoring in a little natural shelter behind an Indian island called Oorgande. Pausing only long enough to eat, we continued our journey, and the same evening stopped in a channel, between two islands, called Nargana.

That night I went on an alligator expedition up a near-by river.

It may be of interest to many people to know how

hunting is done at night in the wilds, so I will give a description of this outing.

I carried a .303 Army Service rifle, using split nickel bullets, and carrying a spot-light. This is an excellent device, an acetylene lamp, the charge and water being carried in a receptacle which is hung in your belt. From thence a tube runs to a circular leather band which fits round the head, and on this band is affixed the lamp with a reflector. Thus the rays penetrate the darkness straight ahead from your forehead, and the beams, encountering the eyes of an alligator, or other reptile, flash vivid red. With the cat family, such as the leopard, jaguar, etc., the eyes flash green, and an excellent sight can be obtained with a rifle.

I killed four alligators on this occasion, and here had a very narrow squeak, which again illustrated the fact that one should never grow careless. Having killed alligators in many parts of the world, I know their habits fairly well; and in a reed-bed up the river I had noticed a number of tiny reptiles which had only recently hatched out. They are curious little chaps when this size, and I thought I should take two or three back. I had already picked up one, and was reaching for another when it commenced to make a curious, thin, rasping noise. This was immediately followed by a tremendous smashing and splashing in the reeds, and almost before I could reach for my rifle, which I had deposited in the bottom of the boat, Mrs. Alligator, thoroughly enraged at the molestation of her offspring, rushed to the rescue and came right alongside. I fired like lightning, but I have not the faintest idea where the bullet went. However, the furious creature disappeared, for which I was truly grateful. I really believe she was the most unpleasant female I have ever encountered. An attack by one of these powerful brutes on a cockleshell of a boat up a river in the middle of the night might easily have ended disastrously.

The "skeeters" and sand-flies here were a perfect plague, and as, like a fool, I had neglected to put on



NATIVES GATHERED TO SEE WHIP-RAYS, WHOSE UNDERSIDES ARE WHITE
AND TOPS GREY WITH WHITE SPOTS (p. 47).



TOP SIDES OF WHIP RAYS, SHOWING WHITE MARKINGS AND WHIP-LIKE TAILS.

breeches and top-boots and was only wearing shorts, I paid the penalty. On my return to the yacht sleep was impossible owing to the irritation caused by these obnoxious insects. Did I murmur a few well-chosen words? Ask my brother-hunters, and the fishermen of the Jersey coast! I spent the hours till dawn in violent scratching and cursing, and was more than glad when we raised anchor and left this place of evil memories.

CHAPTER XVI

WE CATCH MANY REMARKABLE FISH—THE MYSTERIOUS KAYMAALS

FOR the first few hours of this day's run, in order to reach the next island, the greatest care had to be exercised while once more traversing a wide channel, intersected by unexpected points of reef. Nearly all these islands seem to have reefs running off or round them, making navigation extremely difficult ; but by watching the colour of the water we were able to go close inshore, astonishing the Indian inhabitants. It was a most remarkable sight—how they put off in their dug-outs, and swarmed on board before we had dropped the anchor in what can best be described as a pool. From the natives I gathered that large fish made this their home, so, impaling a large piece of Spanish mackerel which we had caught by trolling a Wilson spoon behind on our morning's run, I cast out, using my heaviest rod, reel, and 54-thread line. These simple islanders eyed my tackle with amazement ; I am sure they had not the least idea what I intended to do with this—to them—extraordinary contrivance ; but they were not left long in doubt, for, to their great glee, within a few minutes, with a creaking jerk, the top of the heavy split-cane, steel-centred rod bent over, and I was fast into my first really big fellow since we entered the San Blas.

I wasted as little time as possible, putting brute strength into the work of playing it, and when the fish was exhausted, got into the yacht's dinghy, rowed to the shore, which was not more than a hundred yards off, and finished by landing it on the beach. It proved

to be a female nurse-shark, weighing about 175 pounds. I at once despatched it, and cutting off a large chunk, returned to the yacht, when I cast out again. The bait could have hardly reached the bottom before whizz ! off went the line ! The dwellers here were certainly at home, and this time I had all my work cut out. The nurse-shark I had just captured was a baby compared to what I now had on, and after half an hour of battling with muscles and body taut in a temperature of 90° in the shade, I was all in, so Robbie, my coloured engineer, now continued the work. This fish fought like a fiend, and very shortly, the man instead of the fish becoming played out, having rested, I once more took the rod.

It must have been quite an hour and a quarter after first hitting into this big fish before the final signs of exhaustion became apparent on the part of my opponent. I had manœuvred the fish close to the yacht, and in the limpid water could now plainly see the great shape swimming in circles, to my amazement accompanied by a giant of the same species. For a little while I thought the shark I had on was about to be attacked by the other, but quickly perceived the real meaning—I had hooked a male, which is always smaller than the female, and its mate was following her lord and master beneath the surface. I could plainly see that it was at least twice as big again, and pointed the fact out to Lady Brown, who was watching with the keenest interest. Certainly in life this female was most faithful, for it was not till I finally beached the fish in the same fashion as the nurse-shark that she disappeared. As I had surmised, it was considerably larger than the first and weighed 360 pounds.

After ridding the sea of this creature, I sliced off a portion of the white belly and side, then, cutting the rest of the carcase into pieces, dumped them into the dinghy, rowed out, and dropped them overboard.

I now got out one of my big shark lines presented to me by Messrs. Good & Sons, attached the chain and

hook, thrusting the latter through the portion of shark bait (it weighed about 20 pounds). Just as I was lowering this into the dinghy, to be rowed out and dropped into the water some 30 or 40 yards from the yacht, a tremendous plunging and convulsion of the surface took place, with, plainly visible, the wagging tail of the great female that had been following the male I had just caught. Having, as related, previously noticed this curious action of the species after feeding, I wondered what she could have been eating that had given her so much enjoyment. My curiosity was subsequently satisfied.

A few minutes after my big bait had been dropped in away went the line. Seizing it in our hands, Robbie and I struck with all our force, and immediately realised by the tremendous power of the fish we had driven into that our joint strength was unequal to the strain, so we worked the line round the capstan. Had I struck this fish on my rod and line the results would have been laughable, and within a couple of minutes would probably only have ended in losing all the line ; but with the tackle we were using it was a different matter, and unless the hook by some strange chance were torn out, I knew it was only a question of time before we landed the powerful creature.

The Indians were obviously awfully pleased, though they showed very little emotion, their stoicism being quite remarkable. Unlike the natives of Black River, they gave way to no shouting or laughing, but an awed look seemed to have settled on them the whole time my operations against these big fish were going on. By dint of tugging and hauling, letting the line run out to the strong rushes which were of frequent occurrence, we ultimately brought the huge monster alongside the yacht. The line was nearly 150 yards in length, and the Indians, taking one end of it in their cayucas (dug-outs), paddled ashore. There they held on until Robbie and I could follow in the dinghy, and then all together we hauled it in. What a brute it was ! Some

of these big sharks are really most hideous, and this one was nearly barrel-shaped, very similar to the one captured in Kingston Harbour but considerably larger. I was wrong in my estimate as to its being only twice as big as the male I had caught on rod and line, for it proved to weigh no less than 910 pounds. It was another shovel-nose, which are certainly abundant in these waters. I preserved the vertebræ and jaws, adding them to my collection.

My feeling that the Indians were extremely pleased by the capture of these fish was now borne out in a substantial manner, for they presented me with bananas, avocado pears, and eight pine-apples. One is always grateful for fresh fruit in the tropics—in fact, a considerable part of one's diet consists of it.

I believe I could have gone on catching more sharks here, but I was absolutely worn out with these exertions, so that I had not the energy to continue the journey right away, and therefore remained here overnight, not leaving till the next day, when, after another uneventful run, we lay in the lee of one of the small islands. It was almost circular in shape—the shores pure white sand, with about twenty coco-nut palms clustering on the centre of its slight elevation. Everywhere I found I could catch quite a number of edible fish, and this constant supply all through the journey proved a great blessing.

Throughout the whole of the San Blas territory, especially on the outer islands, large numbers of the valuable hawk's-bill turtle are found. We decided to anchor close to the small island that night, and later, when dark, I fixed my spot-light and commenced to walk along the sands. It was towards the end of the breeding season, and, as doubtless many know, the female turtles come out from the sea at night, crawl up on the sands, and deposit their eggs, which are hatched out by the sun, beneath the surface. I had walked only a little way round the island before I detected a hawk's-bill. I ran up and quickly turned

it on its back. It weighed about 150 pounds, which for me to move alone was quite impossible, so I called Robbie, and between us we tied its flappers, and then returning, we brought the dinghy along to where it lay and managed to get it to the yacht. It had a very fine shell, which I removed after killing. This was the only hawk's-bill I despatched during the entire journey. There always seems something so pathetic about turtles that I am afraid my dislike to killing them would debar me from becoming a successful shell hunter.

I returned to the place where I had found this one and soon discovered the eggs. When cooked they make very good eating, being almost like plovers' eggs in flavour.

Scarcely once during the whole of our journey did we lack a variety of fresh food. Nature has been bountiful in supplying this part of the world, and it requires very little exertion to provide a variety of what in the United States and Europe would be described as delicacies.

After weeks of fishing and exploring, every day adding to our knowledge, we visited a chain of islands known as Kaymaal. This is a remarkable group, situated five-and-twenty miles from the mainland, and totally uninhabited. They are clothed with thousands of coco-nut palms and present a most interesting configuration. Approaching them from the mainland, it is possible to anchor close inshore by entering a narrow opening through the coral reefs, but from the main ocean this is out of the question. Facing seaward, the first island was not only covered with coco-nut palms, but right down to the water's edge grew an impenetrable mangrove swamp, and stretching from thence away to where the great rollers boomed on the outer reef was a shallow sandy plateau with a foundation of solid coral for nearly a mile. This was intersected by several small narrow channels from 4 to 6 feet in depth, through which the sea poured almost like a river, the whole of

the rest of the flats being covered with water to the depth of 12 or 18 inches. The mangroves were the home of a very large colony of aigrettes, thousands having nested here and evidently remaining all the year round. I cannot imagine anything more beautiful than the sight of these graceful birds with their lovely pure white plumage, looking like huge flakes of snow, everywhere dotting the vivid green of the mangroves. Towards one end of the island the thick growth terminated at the edge of a perfect sandy beach, with a few yards away a deep blue pool about 75 yards in breadth, into which ran one of the channels from the outer ocean. It looked so fishable that, with some difficulty manœuvring the dinghy into it from the mainland side, we moored where the strong flow of water entered from the sea.

Fishing with light tackle, the variety of sport to be got was surprising, and not only that, but no artist could paint the beauty of many of the fish landed. I am afraid I was entirely unable to classify the majority of these picturesque specimens. One species, which appeared particularly plentiful and was devilish good eating, was almost scarlet, with large red eyes, and in shape was somewhat similar to the perch; another seemed to be of the ling family, and in shade ranged from a beautiful green to a pale yellow, with turquoise blue eyes; others were black, with yellow bands like zebras. All these fish were good fighters and left nothing to be desired in that respect.

In spite of the fact that this pool was virtually shut in from the deep waters of the ocean, yet within its depths lurked the ubiquitous shark. Several times we noticed that the fish when biting freely suddenly ceased for no apparent reason, and it was then, using a large bait on my fine tackle, I cast out, to be almost instantly rewarded with a strike totally unlike anything we had been experiencing, and round the pool dashed this new species, never once attempting to leave its habitat. After about twenty minutes I landed what I knew for

a certainty was driving away the smaller fish—of course a shark, weighing about 25 to 30 pounds. I often wonder if there are any waters where they don't succeed in swimming; for one discovers large as well as small ones in places it would appear impossible for them to enter.

CHAPTER XVII

FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH—THROUGH THE PANAMA CANAL FULL SPEED FOR THE PACIFIC

WHEREVER we anchored our yacht, whilst exploring this minute archipelago, the fishing was splendid. One morning we had ten jack, in weight ranging from 26 to 41 pounds, and the same evening got four large red snappers, the smallest 30 pounds, with one splendid specimen scaling over 50 pounds. The varying shades of red in these fish have a very wide range. I have caught them from the palest salmon-pink to the most vivid red. The jack here were also most beautifully marked, being much brighter in hue than those of the Jamaican waters. One morning off another island close by I caught two fine fish which appeared to me very like the tuna family. They weighed between 25 and 30 pounds apiece, and I should have caught quite a number but for that confounded nuisance the shark again making its appearance. I had struck and played my third fish, and nearly got it to the side of the boat, when with a rush and a bang, away went the line, one of these vicious beasts dashed up, and not only took my fish (which I should think weighed about the same as the other two) in at a gulp, but bit through my wire lead as if it had been a piece of thread. I ran out a heavy shark line, and baiting with one of the two fish I had caught, after a good stiff fight landed the brute. It must have weighed nearly 600 pounds and I guess I could have gone on catching them, but as I now had the yacht I had determined that the Pacific should be the centre of operations.

In mentioning that the fish caught here were very like

the tuna, it may be of interest to fishermen to know that it is an established fact that these splendid fish, the great feeding-ground for which was for many years supposed to be off Catalina, California, are now known to occur in considerable numbers off the New Jersey coast of the United States. A year or two back my old friend Bob Meissner, of the Ocean City Fishing Club, caught two weighing over 400 pounds each; and Van Campen Heilner, in his book *The Call of the Surf*, describes vividly adventures with monsters of the species on the banks about 12 miles off shore. It is estimated that in this locality they run up to over 1,000 pounds in weight.

Still more recently I received a report that a fish if not the tuna, something very closely allied, had been captured off the Canary Islands. It would be most interesting if this could be established, but one must remember that it is only comparatively recently that big-game fishing has been recognised as one of the greatest and most exciting sports in the world. It is really an art which no "fine-weather" fisherman should attempt to pursue, but for real sportsmen who are prepared to endure a certain amount of hardship and take the good with the bad, it will give thrills second to nothing I know of. I have done a considerable amount of big-game hunting in various parts of the world, but my experience is that with modern arms brought to the perfection that they have been to-day, the pursuit of big beasts on land is child's play in comparison with hunting the big beasts of the sea.

I am now compelled to pass over our discovery of that unknown tribe, the Chucunaque Indians, and all that befell us in their country, as it would be poaching on someone else's preserves and would also occupy space which must be devoted to battles with the leviathans of the Pacific.

During our voyage through the San Blas Islands and the Kaymaals, we gathered an immense amount of data, and added largely to our collection, some of our finest

coral specimens and shells being discovered here, and many strange fish. I shall always remember standing on the top of a tiny coral mound which had not yet risen above the surface, about 6 inches of water still flowing over it, and looking down into the miniature caves and crevices, where the surprising beauty of the innumerable fish swimming in and out was such as to be beyond the power of pen to describe adequately. Their brilliant, varied colouring was exquisite—peacock-blue, sky-blue, amber, scarlet, and some with purple stripes, while every now and again shoals of parrot-fish kaleidoscopically appeared like a moving picture.

Time indeed flies in the study of the amazing life in tropical seas. After many adventures and tribulations we started the return voyage. We had to traverse an awful piece of water known to the Indians as Islagandee Channel, and after two more terrific chuquesanas, El Porvenir was once again safely reached, and we went out through the opening in the reef into the main ocean on our run to Colon.

The calmness of the water inside the barrier was cruelly deceptive, for no sooner were we out in the channel than our terrible danger became apparent. A tremendous sea was running, huge rollers sweeping right in and breaking completely across the entrance. Almost before we were aware of our peril we were plunged into the seething turmoil. To turn round, which I would gladly have done, was impossible, and the only thing to do was trust to Providence and proceed. By almost a miracle we reached the open sea, and once clear of the reef I breathed a sigh of relief, for had one of the great curling waves hit us, nothing could have saved us from destruction—we should have been dashed on the coral reef to be smashed to pieces instantaneously. In a sea in which a ten-thousand-ton liner would have rolled considerably we carried on, and as the day advanced the weather conditions grew steadily worse. Finally, calling Lady Brown, Robbie, and John George together, a sort of conference was held to decide

what was best to do. I pointed out that it would be impossible for us to continue the journey to Nombredi Dios and survive, for we were shipping water all the time and every minute I expected the engine to fail. There was no anchorage and the outlook seemed hopeless. We were in a terrible plight. As a last ray of hope, John George told us that right close in behind a reef a few miles farther on was a deep pool, calm as a lake, but our chances of being able to run in between the very narrow opening were extremely slight. In a few words I summed up the position: if we went on we must founder and nothing could save us; if we ran the reef there was a faint chance that all might yet be well. I decided on the latter alternative, trusting to the Goddess of Fortune to see us through. About four or five miles farther on John George informed me we were approaching the place. We were about three miles out, and, looking shoreward, all I could see at that distance was young mountains of white water which shot into the air forty or fifty feet where the rollers burst on the reef.

However, there was nothing to be done but risk it, so turning sharply in, with the sea astern, we drove headlong to the shore. Nearer and nearer we approached; still I could see no opening.

"For the love of the Lord, Boss, can you see a big black rock sticking up?" suddenly asked John George, who was piloting the boat.

Not a thing could I see. I strained my eyes through the flying spume, but there was nothing visible but a roaring vortex of water.

Suddenly Robbie exclaimed: "Right ahead, John!" and there, appearing every now and then, I could see a black object. At this moment we seemed to be lifted up out of the sea by a huge roller and rushed forward at terrific speed. It looked as if we were being hurled to certain death. Afterwards Lady Brown told me she had almost unconsciously noticed that beneath my tan I was absolutely grey, and I frankly confess I was

gripped with fear. On either side of us rose a white wall of water, the deep boom of which seemed to shake the yacht. Straight ahead we rushed, driven by the force of the great roller through a churned mass of foam, and then—before one could count three—the miracle had happened: we were through into the calm lagoon beyond!

After a strain of this sort comes a violent reaction. This was experienced by all of us, and it is on such occasions that the beneficial effects of alcoholic stimulant are abundantly proved. We had a case of champagne on board, and a tumblerful apiece I verily believe did more good than any medicine. It was the first time John George and Robbie had ever taken it, but there was no need for them to acquire the taste for it, and a few minutes after drinking it that wine certainly pulled us all together. "Some" drink—and I was never more grateful for one in my life; and I am sure the rest felt as I did.

How long the heavy wind would blow outside it was impossible to forecast, and it was no use thinking of leaving until it went down, so here we were, anchored in this little pool for goodness knows how long, our departure entirely at the mercy of the weather. There was nothing to do but sleep, and whether it was the effects of the strain we had undergone or of the wine I don't know, but the fact remains that although it was early in the afternoon when we lay down, we none of us awoke until the following morning, to find the sea had abated, and that one of the usual tropical changes had occurred. Up came the anchor and out we proceeded; but now, free from spume, the channel was plainly visible. Certainly at its greatest width it could not have been more than fifteen yards across, and at one place where it entered the lagoon not more than eight. Even now, though the water was calm, the utmost care was necessary to creep out, and how we had shot through the previous day on top of the great wave, with hardly any mark to guide us, I shall never understand.

The rest of our journey to Colon was comparatively uneventful ; but no sooner had we passed in through the outer harbour than once again the wind began to roar, and for ten days following it never ceased, being one of the worst blows known in this part of the world. To those who have never experienced the full force of a tropical blow it may give some idea of the thing when I say that afterwards it was reported that on plantations as far east as Santa Marta, Colombia, and west to Bocas Del Toro, hundreds of thousands of banana trees were wiped out, miles of country being devastated and immense loss caused by the hurricane gale which prevailed.

On arrival at Colon, with very little delay we passed through the Panama Canal on board the yacht, receiving the greatest courtesy and help from the United States Government officials. On reaching Gatun it is necessary to pass through three locks before arriving at Gatun Lake, which has an area of over 180 square miles. In the stupendous work of building the Canal it was necessary to flood vast tracts of land here, and the photographs of the dying jungle give some small idea of the almost pathetic sight we witnessed. Gatun Lake at night, with a full moon, is one of the most eerie and ghostly places I know ; the skeleton trees faintly silhouetted in the pale light, the shrieking of night-birds, and the moan of the wind through the leafless branches always give me the impression that it is indeed the home of lost souls.

After passing through the three locks at Gatun, it took us over four hours to cross this sheet of water before arriving at Pedro Miguel Locks, and later Miraflores, after which it was only a short way to Balboa and the entrance to the Pacific. We did not stop here, but continued our journey down the dredged channel, past Naon and Perico, and starboarding off the heavily fortified island of Flamenco, made towards the island of Taboga, which we had determined to make our headquarters for our operations in the Pacific.

As we proceeded on our journey, on our starboard were the little islands of Changarmi and Tortola, while on our port side, within two miles and a half, was Taboguilla.

The fourteen miles' run between Balboa and our destination was uninterrupted by bad weather, and in the evening we dropped anchor about a hundred yards off Taboga and went ashore in the dinghy.

Old John George had left me at Colon—our voyage through the San Blas, etc., had been too much for him, and he explained to me that he was too old for any more hardships and intended to spend the rest of his life sitting on the dock as a sort of watchman for the small coasting schooners which are always passing in and out. I was sorry to part with the old chap, but quite understood his reasons. Robbie, however, refused to leave me—I doubt if he will as long as I live.

Henceforth I did my own navigating, and it is surprising how quickly navigation is picked up when it becomes a matter of necessity. Lady Brown also became quite expert at handling the wheel, and in the future it was often a relief to have someone to take over the steering after a long spell.

It was in the Pacific I caught my greatest fish—leviathans which I had never before succeeded in landing, although I had known for years of their existence. I thought out many schemes, all of which proved in the end impracticable. I had even conjured up the idea of depth bombs, but had been obliged to confess myself beaten.

On arrival at Taboga, I had as usual made enquiries among the natives in regard to the fishing, and what they told me simply staggered me. I was again faced with the eternal problem—how on earth could I attempt to catch these big fish?

In the Caribbean I had discarded my light fishing tackle for the heavy rods, reels, and lines Messrs. Hardy Bros. had built for me; these in turn had been superseded by the hemp lines presented to me by

Messrs. Good & Sons ; and now I knew that these would have to be scrapped in favour of something else, because if there was even a scintilla of truth in what the natives here were telling me, no tackle I had with me, or had ever seen, would be the slightest use against the Pacific monsters.

That night I hardly slept at all, pondering and worrying over this problem, and the next morning I was no farther towards a solution—when right in the middle of breakfast I had a brain wave.

“ I’ve got it ! ” I shouted.

“ Got what ? ” asked Lady Brown, almost upsetting her cup of tea in her astonishment.

“ Why, how to catch these big fish.”

“ Oh, I’ve heard you say that many times, but I’ve never seen you succeed yet.”

“ I tell you,” I reiterated, “ I’ve thought how to do it.”

She smiled sceptically, and asked how.

“ Why, hooks and lines,” I answered—“ but such hooks and lines as have never yet been built or seen ! ”

She still smiled, and asked where I proposed getting this tackle.

“ I’m off,” I said, “ to the United States Government shops at Balboa to see if they’ll help me. I’ll explain to them what I want made, and for what purpose, and I’m certain they’ll take a live interest.” And hardly waiting to finish my breakfast, I went straight on board the *Cara* and off to Balboa.

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BOOK II

CHAPTER I

THE MAKING OF STRANGE TACKLE—WE CATCH OUR FIRST PACIFIC SHARKS

ON arrival at the Balboa Docks I at once called on the Chief Superintendent and explained my mission to him. He promptly commenced to laugh.

"Say, do I get you right?" he said. "You want me to make you shark-hooks, and supply lines—well, the order is somewhat unusual, isn't it?"

I thought he was going to inform me that it was a shipbuilding yard and not a fishing-tackle shop, but he didn't. I felt sure (as I subsequently found out was the case) he entered into the spirit of the adventure, and he immediately put me in touch with the machine department. There I saw the chief, who called over one of his best mechanics, and I shall never forget their faces when I told them my ideas about these hooks.

"Can you make me some shark-hooks?" I asked.

"Sure," he replied.

"Ah, but nothing like those you may have heard of," I continued. "I want twelve hooks made of half-inch spring or tool steel," and proceeded to draw the size I required.

Several other men had joined us, and when they saw my drawings, they commenced to roar with laughter, and I don't think they stopped for fully five minutes. However, when their mirth had subsided, I went on.

"I want twelve more of three-eighth-inch steel, and a further twelve of quarter-inch."

"Yes, sreee," he replied; "but, say, you can't fish with them. For the love of Mike, have you reckoned the weight?"

"I haven't the faintest notion how heavy they'll be, but I'm going to fish with them," I retorted.

"What about your lines?"

"I'm going to the chief over at the storehouse, to see if he can supply me with a thousand yards of half-inch, a thousand yards of three-eighth-inch, and a thousand yards of quarter-inch manilla rope."

It almost paralysed them—I really think they thought I had completely lost my reason. They were most anxious to know what on earth I was going to catch.

"Sharks, saw-fish, and goodness knows what else," I replied.

"Yes, but, man alive! what are you going to do with them? You can't sell sharks and saw-fish?"

"I don't want to sell them—what I'm after is records. I'm endeavouring to find out the habits of these fish and the size they run up to. I've tried everything I can think of to land them and have never succeeded yet. This tackle will be strong enough to tow the yacht."

"To do what?" they fairly gasped.

"To tow the yacht," I said. "No man in this world can handle these big fish himself, and my idea is to have the line fastened to the capstan, and when I once hook one of these great fish, to let it tow the boat until exhausted; then with the help of my man Robbie, and another native I shall get, we'll work it alongside and finally despatch it with a high-velocity rifle and expanding bullets."

"Go to it, Boss; we'll make the hooks, and no doubt the storehouse will let you have the lines, and we'll all be here, and waiting for news of your first big fish!"

The work was immediately put in hand, and during the next three days, while this strange tackle was being made, I thoroughly examined the district.

Taboga Island is a real gem, with its ancient little village, which is justly considered one of the most typical Spanish examples at present known. It nestles at the foot of what is almost a mountain, over 1,000

feet in height. Nearly all the houses have red and brown roofs, and a tiny white church stands in the centre. Nature is indeed bountiful here—pine-apples, papaya, and other tropical fruits and vegetables grow in profusion. One's simple wants can be amply supplied without much exertion, and I do not wonder that the natives appear part of, and fit in with, the peaceful serenity which pervades everything. It is indeed the land of "Mañana," and after all, why not? What is the use of spending the whole of one's life in a perpetual hurry? It is no wonder that the specialists are kept busy nowadays attending various nervous disorders—almost epidemic in the great cities of the world.

On the shore in front of the village and across the sandy spit joining Morro Island to Taboga an immense variety of curious and beautiful shells can be collected, whilst on the small reef at the foot of the Aspinwall Hotel coral specimens can be obtained which in their delicate and exquisite formation I have seldom seen surpassed. Lovers of nature need never have an idle moment here. There is so much to be seen and enjoyed that even if not engaged in fishing, a month or so here would be an absolute blessing to the jaded town-dweller.

I returned once more to Balboa, where I received surely the strangest consignment of fishing tackle ever seen. I found the big hooks with their chains weighed 14 pounds. I had had the barb on all these hooks filed to the keenness of a razor's edge, so that on striking into the fish, they would cut in, as the mouth of all these great fish is like iron, and with an ordinary hook the chance of penetration is extremely doubtful.

It would be difficult to draw a pen-picture of what the men looked like walking to the yacht, loaded down with the weight of these large hooks and chains, to be followed by more, carrying the big coils of manilla rope I intended to use for my lines. The hooks were splendidly made, and looking at them I had the conviction that it would require something very large, if I was lucky enough to hook it, to smash this tackle.

Returning to the Aspinwall Hotel, Taboga, my headquarters, I was again the recipient of much good-natured chaff, the Panamans in particular being highly amused, and the *Star and Herald* came out next day with a full description of the gear supplied by the United States Government to be used for tackling the great fish. Well-intentioned advice and information simply poured in on me, and it is no exaggeration to say that from His Excellency the President down, everybody eagerly awaited the result of my first attempt.

I had the yacht put into thorough order, the deck cleared of any impediment that might obstruct rapid movement, my guns overhauled, an ample supply of ammunition put on board, and I rose early the next morning to commence my battles with the giant fish of the Pacific.

The view across the ocean from the mound on which the hotel was situated, about a hundred feet above the sea, in the clear morning light was simply marvellous. The placid surface of the bay, with the little island of Morro on the left, a panoramic view of the mainland, and the blue hills, looked almost like a scene set for the stage. Slightly to the right rose the island of Taboguilla, completely clothed in varying shades of green, while in the distance, almost in the centre, were the San José Rock and the islands of Perico and Flamenco, with Panama City, and the little white dome of the Union Club peeping out beyond. What a view!

Lady Brown had now joined me and without further delay we went on board. Robbie had engaged one of the Panamans from the village to help, and between them they had managed to get a dozen Spanish mackerel, and two red snappers, weighing about 12 to 14 pounds each.

During the whole of my fishing operations in the Pacific, I wore nothing but shorts, shirt, and an old khaki drill hat, with legs quite bare. I even discarded shoes. Lady Brown's attire mostly consisted of a khaki drill overall over a bathing dress.

Hauling up the anchor we started off with Taboguilla as our objective. This we reached in about twenty-five minutes. Facing the main ocean, the coast of this island is composed of volcanic rock, affording no possibility of landing, but on the mainland side it has one of the most glorious sandy beaches I have ever seen. It is the perfect realisation of a tropical dream; the golden sand, running from the very edge of the coco-nut palms and other luxuriant vegetation down to the water's edge, gently slopes into the sea, while rising up behind is a mountain 600 feet in height.

Right on the edge of the beach are four extraordinary little huts, only two of which are occupied. These gems of architecture only consist of four upright pieces of wood, with thatched roof and sides, but they add greatly to the picturesqueness of the island.

Passing in the yacht about 50 yards off shore, every object on the sandy bottom was plainly visible. The depth of the water was about 20 to 25 feet, and sand ripples, and even tiny shells, stood out with the utmost clearness. Several big fish scurried off at our approach, and also two large turtles.

As we neared the rocky point farthest from Taboga, for miles the whole sea was alive with myriads of skipper-jack and Spanish mackerel breaking water, while overhead hovered frigate birds and pelicans, the latter, as if at a given signal, dropping perpendicularly into the ocean, a dozen or twenty of them at a time, in their everlasting search for food. It is really remarkable the amount these birds swallow. No human being could possibly eat a fraction of what they consume a day, and it is astonishing how large a mouthful they can take in at a time—but the pelican's capacity is proverbial.

About 50 yards off shore, and close to this rocky point, we anchored on a smooth sandy bottom. I suppose the depth of the water here would be from 15 to 20 feet, and for a quarter of an hour after this I ruminated what my plan of campaign should be, my pondering being rudely interrupted, for, without warn-

ing, into the air, about 30 yards from the boat, sprang a sand-shark. It seemed literally to shake itself, and then back with a crash into its natural element it fell. A hundred and fifty yards away to the left almost at once this was repeated by another, and so it continued all round us : both close to the yacht, and as far as we could see, these fish frequently leaped. They were all sand-sharks, and I have since studied this peculiar characteristic many times, and can only come to the one conclusion—that in this violent fashion they are trying to rid themselves of sea-lice. Although subsequently I must have caught dozens, if not hundreds, never once have I landed one that had not a number of these filthy-looking brownish flat things attached to it. If they are as annoying to fish as their first cousins on land are to us, I do not wonder the poor devils have recourse to almost any method of ridding themselves of the irritation.

I had now decided on my plan of action. I imagined the Spanish mackerel and jack I had brought would be too insignificant a bait for the monsters I believed lurked here, therefore it was necessary I should get something really substantial to tempt them with. I determined to run out four of my smallest-sized hooks and lines, baiting with a Spanish mackerel each, in an endeavour to catch a sand-shark. The dinghy, which we towed, was brought alongside the bow, and I lowered a bait into the little boat, which was rowed out about 35 yards, while I paid out the line. On my giving the signal to stop, it was dropped into the water. This operation was repeated with the other three, so that the four lines were all radiating from the bow of the yacht at different angles. With all of them I had a good many spare yards on deck, so that a fish striking might have a good run before I attempted to drive the hook home. I admonished Lady Brown, Robbie, and the native always to remember one thing—to keep their legs clear of the line, for I knew that if they once became entangled, nothing could save them from going over-

board to almost certain death. Our last line was scarcely out before the first was seized, the spare coils rapidly running from the deck. I picked it up, and let it run through my hands, at first without resistance, then hauled back, and struck with all my strength. Yow! it was as if a red-hot iron had seared my flesh. I had forgotten the friction caused by a rapidly moving dry line when held tight. Robbie now grasped it with me and we both commenced to play the fish. There was no fear of a break, but (as I have subsequently learnt by experience) the greatest care has to be taken in playing a big fish on a hand line. Yes, I had still much to learn. I was assuredly a neophyte with the tackle I was now using.

How that fish fought! Time and again it changed its methods to escape, finally in a wide sweep it circled, passing round the bow. I had yelled to the other man and Lady Brown, and they were hauling in the spare lines as fast as they could, to prevent a general entanglement. They had got two in, and were proceeding to haul in the last, when it was violently torn from their hands.

"Let go this line, Robbie!" I cried, "and help over there. I'll try to manage this one myself."

This other line had now run out its full length, but was tied on to the capstan, and I could see all three of them commencing to haul on this other fish. Suddenly the one they were playing came to the top of the water, smashing the surface with its tail, immediately bolting beneath again, and rushing headlong across my line. Both were now entangled, for the fish proceeded to become inextricably mixed, the two lines becoming as one.

By dint of much hard labour, we regained a few yards, only to have the mad plunges of these fighters tear off with it once more, but ultimately we brought the pair of them alongside, and now I was to learn the wiles of the Pacific sand-sharks. Holding them by the side of the boat while we took a breathing-space

for a minute or two, I told Robbie to get a club I had had made, and, while the three of us held on, to lean over the side of the boat and endeavour to stun them. Just as he was bending over for this purpose, with a smash of their tails against the side of the yacht, like lightning away they both went again, and this was the most violent rush of all. However, they soon spent themselves, and within a few minutes once more we had them floating motionless alongside. Robbie now got one well home with the club, immediately stunning the fish, repeating the same operation with the other.

We disentangled the lines sufficiently to attend to each separately, and all four of us, with hard work, got both up on deck. I really thought they were *hors de combat*, but as I bent over to remove the hook from the mouth of one, without warning I got a tremendous blow from the tail. My shoulder received most of the force, but my face got some of it as well and my pipe was knocked out of my mouth into the sea some yards from the boat. The loss of my old friend would indeed have been a disaster, and everything had to wait while it was being retrieved by Robbie in the dinghy, and I was soon in possession of my old briar, which was none the worse. Taking no more chances with the two sharks, I clubbed them thoroughly, making doubly sure they were despatched before removing the hooks.

I now had my bait for the great monsters.

These two fish weighed between 260 and 280 pounds apiece. I first carefully opened one, examining it for disease. I then removed the head and tail and severed the body completely down the centre, taking out the vertebræ. I now had the two great slabs of fish, which with the guts, head and tail removed, weighed about 75 pounds each.

"Now then," I said, "I'll see whether my theories are right."

"What are you going to do with these two lumps of flesh?" said Lady Brown.

" I'm going to use an entire piece for bait : it's for that I've had the heavy tackle made."

Taking one of the 14-pound hooks, I then impaled an entire half-side of sand-shark on it, attaching it with its chain to a hundred yards of half-inch manilla rope. This done, I performed the same operation with the second piece.

Once more the dinghy was brought alongside the bow, and Robbie and I lowering the bait down, the native rowed away from the side of the yacht, as he had done with the smaller lines, repeating the operation with the second one. I had now my lines out on either side of the boat, and there was nothing to be done but sit down and wait for what might happen.

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CHAPTER II

BATTLE WITH A 1,460-POUNDS SHOVEL-NOSE SHARK— EXTRAORDINARY FISH CAUGHT OFF TABOGA

THE first quarter of an hour I was all anticipation. I think I had expected a rush to follow as quickly as when we had run out the lighter tackle for the sand-sharks, but not a quiver disturbed the lines. Half an hour passed and still no sign of a strike. At the end of an hour I said to Robbie :

“ Let's have some tea.” -

We were very tired and thirsty after our experiences with our first fish. Sand-sharks were still jumping, and Spanish mackerel and skipper jacks were playing on the surface in all directions, while inshore quite a number of small barracouda frequently leaped into the air, flashing in the sun.

All of a sudden, 50 or 60 yards off the bow of the boat, two big garfish about four feet in length tore across the surface of the water in the manner peculiar to this family. No doubt many who have travelled in tropical waters have seen the eccentric method of propulsion employed by these fish. They race along on their tail in a series of jumps, the whole of the rest of the body being completely out of the water. In their wake, cutting the surface at a tremendous rate, flashed the huge black dorsal fin of a mighty shark.

“ Now, what about sharks ? ” I said. “ That fish weighs well over a thousand pounds—its strength must be simply enormous. That's the sort of thing I'm after with the big hooks, and this is the only tackle that could stand the tremendous strain if a fish like that took it into its head to swallow the bait.”

Once more I was keyed up to a pitch of the greatest excitement, for surely, I argued, the size, if nothing else, of the great lump I had fixed to the hook would attract it.

Again my hopes were disappointed, for still there was no sign of a strike. However, it was a beautiful morning, and I now had a good fresh cup of tea, so what with a perfect day, my tea and pipe, I felt it was indeed a case of "God's in His heaven, all's right with the world." I believe it is only poets and fishermen who appreciate the truth of this sentiment.

Lady Brown and Robbie did not seem to think much of my idea of gigantic hooks and baits, while my Taboga native, placidly eating a papaya, appeared thoroughly uninterested—as long as he had his papaya or something to eat, as far as he was concerned nothing else in this world mattered much.

"How much longer are you going to sit there boiling in the sun?" suddenly asked Lady Brown, for the heat was so terrific that the varnish on the deck was all coming up in blisters, while any metal exposed to the full rays of the sun was so hot that it could not be touched.

"Hang it all! let's wait a bit longer," I replied, for I was really very loath to admit failure the first time of trying my new tackle.

"Well, I'm simply sizzling," she retorted, and then proceeded to the stern, got into the cock-pit, and at once went to sleep. A few minutes later I saw the Panaman and Robbie had followed her example, and I must admit I felt much inclined to do the same. It was really too hot and peaceful to bother about anything, and my first excited expectations had worn off.

I began to wonder if these mighty fish would feed on a dead bait on the bottom, or whether there was some means of attaching a large live fish, which would be more attractive. I was drowsing, conjuring up all sorts of visions of Jurassic monsters, when I seemed to see one of my big lines move. I quickly came to life. Yes,

sure enough the slack was commencing to leave the deck—slowly, but ever faster.

“A fish!” I roared—“a fish!!”

Up jumped the Panaman and Robbie as if they had been shot, while a scramble from the back of the boat told me that Lady Brown had also been shaken from her peaceful slumbers and was not going to miss the battle.

The line was now fast running out, gaining in speed every second. What to do I had no knowledge. I knew that to attempt to strike and hold it with our strength would be absolutely ridiculous—we should probably be whipped off the deck and into the sea like wind-blown straws. Robbie was about to catch hold of it, but I shouted to him to let it alone.

With a jerk, and almost a thud, it tightened on the capstan—one could hear the half-inch manilla rope creak under the strain. Slowly the yacht rode ahead. The anchor chain at the bow tightened.

“Haul up the anchor quick!” I cried, and up it came. Freed from this, the yacht was now being towed. I was in the meantime pulling the other big line in as hard as I could.

“It’s one of them!” I cried—“one of the giants I’ve always dreamt I’d land. Whether we’ll succeed with this one I don’t know; but if we do, mark my words, it’ll be the greatest fish I’ve ever captured!”

We now all four seized the rope and hauled on the moving bulk beneath the surface. It did not seem to fight very much, neither were there any violent struggles or tremendous rushes—just an enormous dead weight. We were completely helpless so far as endeavouring to check its progress was concerned, so there was nothing to be done until it had become exhausted.

Slowly it circled, the yacht following, we hauling on the rope the whole time. At last we were glad to find that with our joint strength we were able to commence to work the fish nearer the yacht. By strenuous efforts yard after yard of the line was regained. We now gave the rope a turn round the capstan, while Robbie fetched

the rifle, so that all might be in readiness to give the *coup de grâce* when—as we hoped—it was finally brought alongside the yacht, but a long time elapsed before we were able to gain a sight of this mammoth creature. Persistently we worked it closer and closer, until at last slowly to the surface the great brute came alongside.

The steel hook had been driven completely through, behind the lower jaw, with no danger of ever coming out until cut. What a mouth! Rapidly I fired two bullets through the base of the head, but it had quite the opposite effect to what I had hoped. Instead of killing the fish, it seemed to lash it into a fury. The other three had let go the line simultaneously with my firing, and with immense speed off again it rushed.

The vitality of this fish was simply astounding. It took us fairly half an hour before it was again worked up to the yacht. I could see it was almost dead, but to make certain smashed another expanding bullet through it, and there it lay, feebly flapping its tail. Fastening the line tight, we left it, and all rested for a quarter of an hour.

Now came the question of what on earth we were going to do with it. I was determined to remove the jaws and vertebræ of all great fish, perform an autopsy, thoroughly examine them, and take series of photographs, as I was most anxious to obtain all the knowledge and data I could of these greater inhabitants of the sea.

I carried a long pole with a steel hook at the end, similar to a gaff, and leaning over the side with this, I brought the tail to the surface, when Robbie got a half-hitch round it with a three-quarter-inch manilla rope we had with us. Two of us hauling the line with the hook through the mouth, and the other two the rope round the tail, aided by the buoyancy of the water, we manœuvred it to the stern of the yacht, where we affixed the rope attached to its tail short up on the aft capstan, started the engine, and made for the shore, dragging the bulky carcase behind us. Fifty yards off the beach we dropped the yacht's anchor, and unfasten-

ing the rope from the capstan, allowed the fish to sink to the bottom, and taking the reverse end of the line to that hitched round the tail, rowed ashore in the dinghy with it. Then all together we pulled the fish in. We were able to accomplish this until it reached shallow water, when all our efforts to move it up farther were unavailing. It was virtually high tide, and in this part of the world the Pacific Ocean has a rise and fall of a mean average of 16 feet every 12 hours, so that all I had to do was possess my soul in patience until the ebb, which would leave the monster high and dry.

Lying down in the shade of the palm trees we waited. Slowly the tide receded, but it was over two hours before we were able to get a full view of our quarry. It proved to be another shovel-nose, though far and away larger than any I had yet seen or expected to see. It measured 14 feet 9 inches in length, 11 feet 3 inches in girth, the circumference of the jaws being 5 feet 4 inches. It weighed 1,460 pounds.¹

Robbie, who was by now becoming quite an expert in ichthyology, helped me with the autopsy. To those who have never tried it, I expect this sounds quite a simple operation, but with a fish of this size it takes hours, and it is really very hard work. The skin is extremely tough, and I found that only specially made knives of tool steel (for which again I have to thank the United States Government) would perform the cutting effectively. Even then it was necessary to resharpen the edge frequently, as the rasping, sand-paper hide quickly blunts the hardest steel.

This shark contained fifteen foetal young nearly fully developed. After removing these, together with the enormous liver and entire entrails, we took the flesh off either side of the vertebræ, which, after having been taken out, had to be cleaned. Whilst doing this I found a large calcined growth attached, similar to that of the shark I caught in Kingston Harbour. Whenever I have caught a shark with this disease or mal-

¹ Photograph faces p. 196.

formation, I have always noticed an enormous girth accompanying it. At the end of this book I will give my deductions, etc., on these *post-mortem* examinations, and other facts in regard to their habits.

The photograph shows the tremendous size of this fish in comparison to our two selves.

By the time we had finished our labours, I felt it had been a good day's work well done. I had proved the efficiency of my new tackle, and felt very bucked with this knowledge, as it opened up the probability of catching something still bigger.

Before starting on an intensive campaign against the sea-monsters, I made up my mind to spend a few days with rod and line for the purpose of obtaining general knowledge.

There is a landing-place on Taboga Island which consists of a wooden pontoon, supported on four very large steel drums. It is securely moored to the bottom by chains, and communicates with the land by means of a small wooden bridge and stone jetty, the whole standing out about 50 yards from the shore.

Next day, using Spanish mackerel as bait, and armed with two medium light rods and reels, Lady Brown and I cast out from this dock, and sitting down, peacefully proceeded to await events. We were not kept long in anticipation before I had my first strike, and as the fish made off—"Aha!" I said to my companion, "here's something different!" for as all those who do a considerable amount of fishing know, one's touch becomes so sensitive that, after having fished for some time in any district, you can instinctively tell what you have on, when you have hooked into something beneath the surface, and I knew at once the movement of this fish was totally different from any I had yet caught; but when it suddenly skipped out of the water on its tail, showing the whole length of its body, gleaming beautifully in the sun, we both knew at once what it was, and I ultimately landed the largest garfish I had ever seen. It measured 4 feet 10 inches in length, and

must have weighed from 8 to 10 pounds. When first caught, the brilliant silver of the belly merging into a peacock-blue back was startling in its vividness.

It is an extraordinary-looking fish, long and slender, the head with the almost sword-fish nose being a most interesting feature ; but before I had finished examining this one, Lady Brown was fast in another, which when landed proved almost identical to mine.

We had caught seven of these fish, when, having another bite, and striking, Lady Brown called out :

“ I’ve got something different this time ! ”

The fish she had now hooked was fighting much harder than the garfish, but taking her time, and handling it tenderly, she presently brought to the side of the pontoon a splendid corbina, which, when getting up on the little dock, we found weighed well over 11 pounds. This is another excellent fish for the table, and we made up our minds to feast on it that night.

So pleased were we with our sport that we determined to fish here on the morrow, and as bait was nearly always obtainable we were saved the worry of wondering about that, for one of the worst disappointments I know is to find a perfect day for fishing, and no bait. This has happened to me many times, and I can sympathise with all fellow-anglers who must have experienced the same thing.

Our first two successes when we fished here again proved to be more garfish. Lady Brown after this was being bothered by some apparently small fish niggling her bait continually. I advised her to strike immediately she felt a touch, and after several ineffectual attempts she said :

“ I’ve got whatever it is, but it doesn’t seem to be much ! ”

It showed no fight—all she had to do was reel it straight in.

“ What on earth is it ? ” she enquired.

“ Wait a moment,” I answered, “ and I’ll show you.”

I raised it on to the dock. It was about 20 inches

long, the back dark grey in colour, with a pure white belly, and a mouth fashioned like an extremely strong beak. I carefully detached the hook, meantime informing her that the beak-like mouth was strong enough to smash one's finger.

"Now watch!" I said, and commenced to stroke the white belly gently. Slowly it started to expand—larger and larger it grew.

"Heavenly Powers! It'll burst in a minute! What's the matter with it?"

"Nothing," I replied, "it's a blow-fish—just feel it now."

It was almost as round as a balloon and tight as a drum. I explained that this fish could at will inflate itself, nature having provided it with this curious means of frightening away its enemies. I suppose, when attacked beneath the surface by some other fish, its antagonist must feel very astonished (if fish are capable of being surprised) to see this queer creature turning into a balloon in front of its very eyes! I have caught large quantities of these blow-fish, but differently marked, along the New Jersey coast, chiefly in Barnegat Bay and Corsons Inlet, also in the Gulf of Mexico, in the Pacific off Corinto, and many other places, and have never failed to stroke them, invariably producing this laughable inflation. Frequently if you throw them back when they are swollen out like this, they will float on the surface for almost a minute, apparently so much surprised that they forget to release the air.

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CHAPTER III

SPLENDID SPORT WITH ROD AND LINE—A PAPAGAYOU OF SIXTY-FIVE AND A HALF POUNDS

Not long after this I was rewarded by catching another strange inhabitant, almost black, relieved by a broad orange band, and shaped like a John Dory, or bream. It emits a decided regular grunt when brought to land. The noise issues through two apertures immediately adjoining the pectoral fins. With this fish much care has also to be exercised in removing the hook from the mouth, which is shaped almost like a pig's snout, and is as hard as iron. With its grunts and its appearance its name should be "pig-fish," and that is what I always call it, but what the scientific name is I have never been able to discover.

After lunching we resumed our fishing. Whilst Lady Brown still used her rod, I had changed mine for heavier tackle, using 36-thread line, with a correspondingly larger hook and bait. I had not been fishing more than ten minutes before I had a tremendous strike, and straight out to sea rushed the fish. Harder and yet harder I applied the brake: not a bit of use—I might just as well have tried to stop the *Majestic*.

"O Lord!" I groaned, "here goes the lot!"

Twang! all the line had run out down to the bare spool, and here broke off.

"Two hundred yards of line gone west! Damn!"

"Really, your language is simply awful," said Lady Brown.

"Oh, have a heart!" I replied. "How do you expect any human being to remain complacent when they've lost the whole of their tackle?"

"Yes, but you don't need to say things like that."

"You've never been smashed up yet," I retorted.

"I hope if I ever am," she replied piously, "I shan't use such strong expressions!"

However, I really think the fates ordained I was to have my revenge, for we had hardly finished speaking, and I was just going back for another line, when over bent the point of her rod, and she was fast into a big fish.

"I can't hold it!" she cried.

"Brake harder!" I advised unfeelingly.

"Do take the rod," she implored, in an agonised voice.

"Not I!" was my emphatic answer. "I want to see what you're going to do!"

Straight out to sea—just like the one I had struck—went her fish.

"It's getting to the end of the line, and I can't stop it."

"Neither can I," I retorted.

The end was reached. Snap! it parted on the spool.

It was over an hour before anything happened, when once more it fell to Lady Brown's lot to strike into a big fish, whereupon she again called for help, but I was hard-hearted and adamant and refused to render the slightest assistance, being liberally rewarded with *sotto-voce* expressions that I wouldn't have disdained to use myself. However, she handled this fish splendidly—I'm not sure I didn't secretly hope she would lose it again, for I was certainly enjoying the fun; but after twenty minutes' strenuous fight, I saw she was really becoming exhausted, so I weakened. Preparing to heap coals of fire on her head, I suggested she should hand over her rod to me, and take a breathing-space—and the trouble I brought on myself! It seemed to be the last straw that broke the camel's back, and despite her struggles with the fish, she turned on me.

"I'll land it myself now, if I drop; and if I don't,

it'll be all your fault"—and land it she did, though it took nearly forty minutes before it was brought alongside, when I was allowed to get the gaff well home, and between us, with much difficulty, we dragged it up. It was a sand-shark, weighing just over 80 pounds ; but for the rest of the day I followed the example of Agag ! And I learnt quite a lot about fishing during the next few hours, my pupil having turned professor.

Our sport with the rod had proved so interesting and exciting we determined to continue it and went off in the yacht next day, passing between Taboga and Urava Island, both fishing from the stern, trolling a Wilson spoon. We had no luck until nearing Chamé Island, when I had a good strike. Stopping the engine, I played the fish carefully and landed a pretty jack about 28 pounds. Passing Chamé, and close to the Valladolid Rock, we both hit into a fish simultaneously, and landed two more jack about the same size as the first.

Swinging round in a broad circle, leaving Chamé Point on our stern, we made for the island of Melones, where we had a good bag of Spanish mackerel ; then anchored close in to a little sandy beach on the mainland side of Melones, where we took some food and spent the rest of the afternoon exploring the island.

The tide was on the flow, though still well out, and in between two rocks near the water's edge I found a fine pearl-oyster. Choosing the time when it was almost dead low tide, we anchored next day in the same place and by working among the rocks managed to get a splendid lot of these beautiful shells. Some of them were nearly as large as dessert-plates, and in the same place we also found some fine cowries, their brilliant surface looking as if newly varnished. They were red-brown in colour, mottled, and some striped all over.

High up on the ledges of rock around the island is the home of innumerable diving cormorants. It is a wonderful sight to see these birds circling, and dropping like a leaden plummet from a height of over 200 feet

straight into the sea after small fish. Their keenness of eye and accuracy in diving seem almost miraculous.

When the tide turned and commenced to run in strongly, we were perforce compelled to cease searching for shells, and rowing out to the yacht, commenced to fish from our anchorage ; but except for an unsophisticated garfish, found the jack, mackerel, etc., would apparently only take a fast-moving bait, still or bottom fishing for them being useless.

Just before we left for Taboga a school of the largest porpoises I have ever seen passed close alongside the boat, and during our return journey played round us ; many of them must have weighed considerably over a thousand pounds. So close were they that on many occasions, when they rose from the water, I could easily have shot them had I so desired. We watched them disporting themselves, until apparently they became tired and pursued their rolling way towards the mainland. We then started trolling from the stern, and before we arrived at Taboga managed to land three good jack about 30 pounds apiece. These I saved, intending to go out the following day off Taboguilla, but after all preparations had been made the engine refused to work. For sheer, pure cussedness give me a marine engine. It may be running perfectly until you stop, and then for no earthly reason it will refuse to start up again. That is just what happened here. We spent over an hour and a half trying to make that piece of machinery do its duty, but it strenuously refused, so with much trouble I had to get another boat to tow us ignominiously into Balboa Docks, where, after examination, it really seemed impossible that such a triviality should have upset one's plans. A tiny spring had become deranged or broken, and was all put right within an hour ; but the whole day had been wasted, and my three jack were now useless for bait, so we did the town, and started back in the evening.

Just before we had passed Tortola Island, which lies between Balboa and Taboga, I saw a big jet, almost

like steam, blow into the air about a hundred yards off the port bow.

"I'm going to show you something," I said to Lady Brown, who had not noticed anything. "Look over there."

Her amazement was great when another big steam-like jet was blown upwards, and there appeared a gigantic brown mass, larger than our yacht. Its size was really frightful.

"What is that enormous fish?" asked Lady Brown.

"Your fish is a mammal," I replied. "You are now seeing your first whale."

I wanted to give her a good view, so turning the yacht's head in the direction in which we had seen it submerge, and reckoning its course of progress, we headed for it and were rewarded when once more this colossus made its appearance. It came to the surface this time no farther off from the boat than 30 or 40 yards, and at this distance we could distinctly hear the strong hiss as it blew. It was a great sight as it rolled over and dived below, the strange, flattened-out, horizontally placed tail (that of the porpoise's is the same) coming clear of the water. I could not help thinking what a tremendous experience it would be if I ever harpooned one from the yacht, and wondered how many miles we should be towed before the fight ended.

Resuming our journey, a little farther on we ran into a school of porpoises, which followed us almost to Taboga. In a vast expanse like the Pacific there is always something fresh to occupy one's attention, and give interest—the varied sea-life I have witnessed travelling down from San Francisco past the Central American Republics to Panama has always made me realise how little one knows of that which dwells within the depths. I think there is no doubt that the finest fishing in the world can be obtained in these waters.

I suggested that we should try the pontoon again, but not with our light lines—"once bitten, twice shy";

so instead of going to Taboguilla next day, we commenced to fish here.

I had not long to wait before I had a real bite. I struck as it ran and at once knew I was fast into a good fish.

"This is something different again," I said. As I spoke, out of the water came a big head with the mouth wide open, shaking furiously.

"What is it?"

"Hanged if I know."

Carefully I played the fish. Whatever else it might be it was certainly game, and it was well I had my heavy tackle. Presently it commenced to swim rapidly close to the surface, while above appeared a curious back dorsal ornament—it could hardly be called a fin, it was not unlike a cock's comb—and then I knew what I was fast into, though it was far larger than any I had previously encountered.

"It's a papagayou!" I shouted. This is the Spanish name—I believe meaning "daddy rooster" or "cock bird"; but after about five-and-twenty minutes I had it beat and successfully landed it.

The hues of nearly all fish caught in these waters are simply wonderful, and this was a most beautiful example, with its curious cockscomb-like back fin in varied colours. It weighed 65½ pounds. I do not know whether this is a record for this species, but it was certainly by a long way the largest I had ever captured. Those I had previously brought to gaff would average somewhere in the vicinity of 10 to 12 pounds. Quite a number of the natives from the village came to look at it, and I judged from their conversation it was also the largest they had ever seen. I don't know if it would have been good eating, as we did not sample it, keeping it for Taboguilla next day.

After this we had several more fish, including one or two corbino of about 3 or 4 pounds, and a 5-pound snapper—a good sporting day, and when we knocked

off we felt very pleased with ourselves and the world in general.

After dinner we were treated to a real Taboga night, with the moon at full. It was a sight worth seeing. The view looking through the palm trees, gleaming in the pale light out on to the Pacific, calm, peaceful, and shimmering, its surface reminding one of a lunar glacial effect, remains ineffaceably stamped in my memory.

Being an island and away from the mainland swamps it is reasonably free from mosquitoes, and it is very interesting to go down on the pontoon and watch the globes of phosphorescence in the water, almost like blue fairy-lamps. As fish at night are always plentiful beneath the dark surface, they seem to leave a glowing stream of fire behind them; but all this has to be seen to be thoroughly appreciated—the tropics both by day and night are a never-ending source of wonder.

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CHAPTER IV

WE FIGHT THREE SAND-SHARKS SIMULTANEOUSLY— REMARKABLE FISH ON LAND

BRIGHT and early next morning we cruised to Taboguilla, anchoring in the identical spot where I had caught the huge shovel-nose shark a few days previously. I had brought my papagayou, which I required as bait for the preliminary operations, and at once ran out four of my smallest lines and hooks—i.e. the quarter-inch manilla, etc. We must have seen dozens of sand-sharks on our way, and the lines had not been in the water more than a few minutes before the fun commenced fast and furious. Away went the port line, and immediately the starboard followed it. A real fight was taking place on either side of the boat. There had been no time to get the other two lines in, and while all four of us had our attention fully occupied by the two fish we had on, off went both the other lines. Before the slack on deck of one was fully run out, it stopped, but the other continued right to the end, to be brought up with a jerk on the capstan. All being fully occupied, we had to leave this shark to its own devices, but on glancing in the direction at intervals, we could see by the jerking of the line that it was well hooked. I knew quite well what was going to happen, and registered a vow that this was the last time I would run out four lines, for an inextricable tangle was an absolute certainty. In their circling and struggling all three were bound to come together. They did, and they even managed to wind themselves up in the anchor chain. We were now in an appalling mess. As we looked over the bow, there they were, all of them tugging in different

directions, wound round and round the chain; and the task of freeing them seemed hopeless. It was no use pulling up our anchor, as its weight, together with the three fish, would be quite beyond our strength to raise; and to cut the lines and thereby lose hooks and chains was unthinkable. What a hell of a tangle!

"There's only one thing to do," I said, "and that's to leave the whole damned lot till they fight themselves to a standstill"; so, puffing, blowing, and perspiring with our exertions, we sat down to a much-needed rest. We had sat at ease for no more than a few minutes when Lady Brown called my attention to an extraordinary sight.

"Heavenly Powers!" she ejaculated (her usual exclamation of surprise), "look at all the sharks coming up to the boat!"

Ahead of the bow at least thirty fins were showing above the water, all making in one direction. At first I could not make out what this procession meant, but light suddenly dawned on me. The struggling sharks were bleeding from where the hooks had penetrated, and their voracious brethren, attracted by the smell of the blood drifting down with the current, were following the scent. Right up to the boat they swarmed, circling like a pack of wolves round their prey, ever waiting for an opportune moment to dash in and cannibalistically feed on their kind. By firing bullets into the water and spanking the side of the yacht, we managed to drive them off, but not very far, for we could see them quite distinctly, watching and waiting at a distance of 50 or 60 yards from us.

Our three hooked sharks were now completely exhausted, but we were still no nearer a solution as to how we should get them disentangled from the anchor chain. However, we ultimately got over the difficulty.

Detaching first one line and then the other from the capstan, to which they were all three fastened, we gradually unwound them as far as we could, then, bringing the dinghy round to the bow and holding on

to the anchor chain, reached into the water with an iron hook on the end of a long pole and managed to get hold of each in turn separately beneath the surface. Like this we brought them one by one to the top, supported them there until the final disentanglement could be accomplished, and after clubbing them to make sure they would do us no further damage when once on board, the four of us together hauled all three fish on deck.

They appeared to be almost identical in weight, ranging about 260 pounds apiece. I opened them, examining them carefully for disease, etc., and as usual preserved their vertebræ and jaws.

The watching sharks had now approached close to the boat again, but I had ample bait for my heaviest tackle, so did not bother about them, leaving them to vent their rage on one another, which this family are not loath to do, for no beasts on land fight with a greater savagery and malevolence than these monsters of the sea.

I now impaled two masses of flesh on my 14-pound hooks, ran them out from the yacht and proceeded to await events ; but this time there was no long period of waiting as on my first attempt. Evidently the swarm of sand-sharks were not the only fish attracted by the smell of blood, for within ten minutes—slowly at first, then ever faster—off went one of the heavy lines.

Thung ! it came up with a jerk on the capstan, taut as the hawser of a straining liner when being docked. So tremendous was the strain placed on it that the water sprayed from the wet line. It at once slackened.

" Gone ! " I cried.

Hauling in, we found the hook cleared—evidently when it had struck into the iron mouth, it had not penetrated. Quickly fixing on another chunk of flesh, out it went once more. At the end of about half an hour, both lines seemed to go off together, each travelling in the same direction, converging off the bow, and almost simultaneously came up with a tremendous jerk when the ends were reached. The yacht rode ahead under the force of the pull.

"Now we're going to see something," I said. "If these fish pull in opposite directions it'll be devilish funny to watch!"

Now some extraordinary action beneath the water occurred which I have never been able to understand. Both lines suddenly dropped dead slack, and picking them up, it at once became evident that not only was there no fish at the end, but the hooks also had gone. We hauled them in, and in each case the half-inch manilla rope had been completely severed, as if cut clean with a knife. How this was accomplished, considering the chains attached to the hook were over six feet in length, and the line itself was severed at a distance of two or three feet above this, is quite beyond me. It would almost seem as if the fish possessed the instinct to come forward and bite the line through, having deliberate knowledge that in this way it could liberate itself. I was, however, learning all the while, though I must admit I was somewhat disgusted.

As it was a perfect day, with a dead calm sea, it was suggested we should cease fishing and explore the sandy beach on Taboguilla; so up came the anchor, and we ran the yacht back a short distance, anchoring close off shore, proceeding thence in the dinghy. The water was so tempting here that we could not resist a bathe, but there was no swimming out—we remained in about three feet of water, with Robbie standing on guard with an ever-ready rifle in case of possible emergencies. I must admit there was not much pleasure in it, for the certainty that the water was infested by sharks, and having to be the whole time on the *qui vive*, quite spoilt our enjoyment. Towels were unnecessary here, as within a few minutes, walking about the beach, our costumes were as if they had never been wet, and the strength of the sun's rays would, no doubt, have skinned anybody who had not become thoroughly acclimatised. We searched for some time for shells, and got together a most interesting lot before wandering farther afield.

Among the bushes bordering the beach we found a

large colony of crabs. They were almost identical with the hermit-crab, which, doubtless, many people have seen and picked up when wading in the water close to the shore ; but the difference between the land-crab and the hermit-crab of the sea, which annexes an empty shell under water, turning it into a sort of home and running about the bottom with it always attached, withdrawing into it at will on any sign of danger, is that the land-crab evidently finds an empty shell on the beach and immediately makes a domicile of it. We watched for some considerable time, and found—not only now, but on many subsequent occasions—that the land-crabs never entered the sea and were able to withstand the roasting heat of the sun without its having the least effect on them. They closely resemble their prototype, the hermit-crab, but here on land they actually climb the plants and trees to feed on insects, etc. The way they were able to run up the sides of the palm-trees and bushes, with their shell attached, was most remarkable.

Inland from the San Blas I had also found crabs like this, climbing trees, and feeding on the ripe fruit, and I later discovered many of them when 25 miles up the Bayano River, some distance from the banks in the interior of the dense bush. This will, no doubt, appear surprising to many people, but if one studies closely the evolution of life in its earlier stages, it is easily explained.

Scientists recognise that millions of years ago apparently some of the worm-like creatures left the sea for the land, and developed what can best be described as tubes in the skin, or a species of tiny lung, for breathing air. There is no doubt that spiders, scorpions, and centipedes evolved in this way. Beyond question, in certain rivers of Queensland there are very stumpy fish which have an actual lung as well as gills, and this is yet another proof of nature's amazing work. The reason is that the waters of these rivers run low in the summer, and the lung is developed to help the animals

to breathe. In Egypt, and in several countries of South America there are fish of the same family, with two lungs as well as gills. The rivers in which they live dry up entirely in the summer, and gills, the prime functions of which are for breathing in water, are then quite useless to the fish. So they more or less bury themselves in the dry mud and breathe by their lungs until the wet season comes and the rivers fill. They can walk on their fins. In fact their fins may be described as badly made limbs—so here you have really a fish out of water.

The small fish called "godame" in the Black River, Jamaica, and mud-fish can live a considerable time out of water. I have kept the former for over a week in damp moss and on returning them to their natural element have found them as lively as ever.

During a period of research work on the Pacific shores, and off Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and especially the Pearl Islands (about 50 miles off the coast of Panama), I have many times found a most extraordinary creature. It apparently lives in the sea, but at low water can be seen on the rocks or in shallow pools. On being disturbed its action is almost the same as a land-lizard—it immediately makes for the water, covering the ground in a series of leaps, jumping from rock to rock, and being able to cross gaps of from 3 to 4 feet in this manner. Up nearly every river in Central America one can often see the lizards, whose natural home is the bush, run across the surface of the water at great speed, crossing a stream of 40 to 50 yards with ease.

There are several species of crab that, crawling or running alternately, are able to make surprisingly long jumps, bunching themselves on their legs and covering quite long distances at each spring.

Again, you have another species of crab which seems to enjoy leaving the water, and, quite unaffected by the blazing heat of the white sands, runs about with great rapidity, making holes for itself on a beach the heat

of which is so great that to walk on it with naked feet would be impossible. I noticed quite a large colony of these crabs on the shores of the Chamé River, just above the mouth where it enters the Pacific.

Collectively it is easy to see there are ample links provided in the evolution of land-life from sea.

Having, then, spent a considerable time in watching the land hermit-crabs at Taboguilla and in collecting shells, we discovered a spring of beautifully clear water, which I should imagine never runs dry. It is on the northern side of the hill, amongst dense vegetation. This spring, I believe, is highly mineralised. It is a most unlikely place to discover a natural bubbling well like this, as Taboguilla Island is quite small and its origin undoubtedly volcanic, and nowhere else is water to be discovered, whether formed by rain-pools or otherwise.

We returned to Taboga with the fixed intention of going after great fish again next day, a plan which we carried out. I had several portions of sand-shark flesh left over, and on our arrival in the yacht immediately ran out the two big lines, not bothering this time to attempt to catch sand-sharks, which were now only interesting as bait. I had not been fishing more than twenty minutes when we were rewarded. Off went one of the big lines, to be brought up short on the capstan. I knew this fish was not as large as my 1,400-pound shovel-nose by the fact that the yacht was not pulled ahead, and in about three-quarters of an hour, after hard work, we got it alongside the boat and despatched it with a rifle, then towed it astern, fixing it aft, where we left it dangling in the water, suspended by the heavy rope kept for this purpose. We continued to fish with the other line and within an hour smashed into a second.

Again this was not as large as I had hoped, and in about the same time we had the pair of them safely hitched to the stern of the yacht, proceeded to up anchor and tow them towards shore for the purpose of beaching them on the high tide. That done, the

receding water left them grounded, and they proved to be shovel-nose sharks, both males. One measured 12 feet 4 inches in length and 7 feet 4 inches in girth; the other 12 feet 7 inches, and 7 feet 9 inches in girth, their respective weights being 860 and 920 pounds. I opened them both, thoroughly examining, and removed the vertebræ and jaws.

CHAPTER V

"IT'S THE DEVIL! CUT THE LINE, BOSS—CUT THE LINE!"—BATTLE WITH A GREAT HAMMER-HEAD SHARK

WE spent several more days after the big fish, getting more shovel-nose, none over a thousand or under eight hundred pounds, after which we determined to change the locality and try elsewhere. The appearance of the channel between Taboga and Urava had much attracted me, and we now decided to make that our objective. I made local enquiries among the natives to know if any big fish had been seen here.

On the slope just above high water there stands a little house where a Panaman cultivates pine-apples, papaya, corn, etc., and I was assured that some time previously wading off here two men had been killed by very large sharks, which could frequently be seen in the channel, so a day or two later we proceeded there. Our first attempts to find a good anchorage were fruitless, the reason being that the bottom appeared composed of nothing but coral, affording no secure hold, and the current ran very strongly; but at the entrance facing Taboguilla, where the water broadened out towards the main sea, about 160 yards from the shore, we discovered an eddy with a sandy bottom, and here we stopped. As usual I ran out my sand-shark lines to provide bait, and very shortly captured one. It was larger than the usual run, fought like a demon, and weighed just over 300 pounds.

"Look here," I said, "if the fish in these waters are anything like the size the natives say they are, let's give them a real feed!" and the masses of flesh I impaled on my big hooks must have weighed quite a

hundred pounds each. These great slabs were rowed out in the dinghy and dropped overboard, and then a long period of expectation followed.

The morning passed and we lunched on board. Believe me, there were no privations attached to our feeding on the boat, and the idea that the tropics whittles down one's appetite certainly did not apply in my case, for when we fed on board our meal usually consisted of a big plate of soup each, afterwards hot tongue or corned beef, with carrots and turnips. The fact that all these were tinned did not seem to us, in our hungry condition, to detract from their appetisingness, and we always had pine-apples, bananas, oranges, or whatever fruit was in season as well.

It was about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and I was beginning to wonder seriously if we should have a strike, when a movement was seen on one of the lines. Away it went, but this time much more swiftly than I had yet seen it travel. So great was the force when the fastened end was abruptly reached that I expected to hear the rope part with a crack.

"We're into a real one this time," I said, and Robbie and I immediately hauled in the other line as hard as we could, to prevent it becoming entangled or caught in the bottom. Our boat was straining at the anchor chain—up came the anchor, and ahead we went into deep water, for the bottom here shelves very rapidly. We could not bother with our old iron hook, which was now hanging straight down in the depths, our attention being too much occupied with what we had on. Presently the big fish swung round and proceeded to make up the channel, which at the other end has a dangerous barrier of rocks running well out, leaving a rather small opening to pass through, and I had moments of anxiety, speculating whether, if the fish took it into its head to swim through here, we should not smash against the bottom. The next day the *Star and Herald* would have recorded the wreck of the good ship *Cara* by a monster of the deep, whereupon I can almost hear the

American section saying, " Bughouse ! " However, it did not please this giant we had firmly hooked to attempt this feat of navigation, for when nearer the rocks, it doubled on its tracks, and back we proceeded. This time it continued on its course until we were clear of Urava.

" It's not a shovel-nose this time," I said to Lady Brown, " and it's not a bit of use my conjecturing what we've got on until we see it, but I'll bet it's another record ! "

The four of us were now holding the line, but our efforts were quite ineffectual against the strength of this fish. After well over an hour and a half, during which we had been towed some considerable distance, we could plainly feel the fish weakening, and now all together, straining as hard as we could, we commenced to work it nearer to the yacht. Yard by yard it was approaching, when suddenly Robbie and the native, yelling like madmen, dropped the rope and ran towards the other end.

" Lord, Boss ! it's the devil. Cut the line, Boss—cut the line ! "

My view having been obscured I had seen nothing and could not understand what was causing such a panic.

" For the Lord's sake don't be such fools ! " I shouted to them—" come on back ! " for when they had let go of the rope it had again run out to its full length and all the work of hauling the fish in close had to be done again.

Very reluctantly they returned, and once more we started our muscle-racking operation. Presently the most hideous sight appeared as a horrible-looking mass came to the top of the water.

" Merciful heavens ! " cried Lady Brown, " what is it ? "

I was wild with excitement.

" It's the greatest hammer-head shark I've ever heard of," I replied. " If we lose this fish it'll break my heart, for I'll never get another like it as long as I live ! "

Robbie and the native were still begging me to cut, but in forcible language I told them not to be idiots,

and in short staccato sentences (I was puffing and blowing too much to make myself lucid) I explained it was another species of shark, which they did not believe, being absolutely convinced it was the devil, which, for some reason best known to themselves, they seemed to imagine dwelt in the sea here.

"Haul on, and look out for squalls!" I shouted. "I'm going to shoot."

Crack! crack!! crack!!! the rifle sounded. I plugged three bullets into it as quickly as I could. One surge of water, and it lay quite still, while blood and redstringy portions of its flesh floated away on the current.

"Now, what about your devil?" I asked them.

Giving the rope a hitch round the capstan, we now all went to have a look at the ghastly object alongside, and really I could forgive anybody for being frightened of the spectacle presented. Truly here was an ocular demonstration of grotesque life existing to-day as it did in the Mesozoic period. This strange creature was certainly unlike anything else swimming in the sea. With great care we worked the big rope round the tail, as before fastening it to our stern, and proceeded back to Taboga. We had been such a long time over the capture of this fish that darkness was now rapidly approaching, and on arrival at our anchorage an autopsy or photograph was out of the question. At a signal from the yacht's siren, two pangas put off from the shore, and they, coupled with the yacht's dinghy, towed the great carcase to the beach. I could do nothing with it that night, and the tide being low at the time, had to get a number of other men to help haul it above high-water mark. This took the full strength of sixteen people, but it had to be done, as I knew perfectly well if it remained in the sea overnight other sharks would come in and tear it to pieces.

By this time we were thoroughly worn out, and went to bed early, for it would occupy the best part of the next day to take a series of photographs of our capture and dissect it properly.

At daybreak I summoned as many natives as I could get, and then this great-grandfather of the hammer-head family was again hauled into the water, to be rowed out by the pangas and dinghy, and made fast, and off we chugged to Taboguilla, where it was beached on the high tide. Instead of landing this time on the sandy beach, I ran up farther, nearer where we usually fished, and worked it in to where the sea runs up on stones and boulders.

Later, on the water receding and leaving it fully exposed, we were able to realise fully this remarkable specimen.

First our attention was attracted by lateral scars on the belly and side, stretching from the tail to the end of the gills, which had been partly mutilated. The left pectoral fin had been bitten off for more than half its length, leaving the shortened stump. Almost in the centre, on either side of the fish, a frightful scar showed, which the most unversed person could see was caused by some gigantic monster seizing the hammer-head across the middle. One can only conjecture what the span of jaw of this opponent must have been, but it was certainly very much larger than the fish we had captured.

I could not help wondering why it was that in a battle with what must have been an overwhelmingly greater adversary the creature now lying before us had not been rent to pieces and destroyed. Did its mate come to the rescue? Who knows? I should dearly have loved to witness a fight like this—it would have been like living in the Mesozoic epoch, a spectator of the slaughter among the giants existing in that age of colossi; but I had yet to become an eye-witness to one of these remorseless encounters.

Having examined the scars and mutilations, we carefully measured it. It was a male fish. Although it was 17 feet 6 inches in length, its girth was only 7 feet 5 inches. The hammer head measured from tip to tip 4 feet 6 inches. The relative size in comparison with myself can be seen in the photograph. On the

extreme ends of the strange protuberance the eyes were situated. It weighed 1,350 pounds, but the fight it put up far exceeded that of my first big shovel-nose, which weighed 1,460 pounds.¹ I think probably the reason for its being so thin in comparison with its length is the fact that it had not fully recovered from the rending it had received in the marine battle, as the scarred body showed the gashes had only recently healed.

By the time we had towed this fish from Taboga to Taboguilla and examined it externally the day was well advanced. It would take some hours, I knew, to open this fish up and dissect it thoroughly. Lady Brown had gone higher up in the shade of the palm trees, and Robbie having rowed out to the yacht and fetched the knives, etc., we proceeded with this operation. Whew! holy smoke!! decomposition in the tropics is very rapid—this fish had been caught the day before, and what the warm, humid night had started the strong morning sun had proceeded to finish.

I called out loudly to Lady Brown :

“ Can you come down here a minute ? ”

All curiosity she came running up to me, expecting to be shown something out of the common, and I innocently asked her if she had any scent. That moment a puff from the fish struck her. The rest of the story I shall pass over, but not being selfish I didn't see why I should have all the treats ! However, one can get used to anything after a time, I suppose, and the autopsy had to be done.

No organic disease was apparent in this fish, but the stomach contained two red snappers, which it had recently dined off before being captured. They weighed at least 40 to 50 pounds apiece. The marine doctor must have prescribed plenty of nourishing food for its recuperation ! On removal, the vertebræ proved to be quite different from those of the shovel-nose and sand-sharks, as were also the jaws and teeth.

I was correct in my surmise—it took the remainder

¹ Page 160, and photograph page 196.



HEAD OF 1,550-LB HAMMER-HEAD (p 181)



HAMMER-HEAD SHARK (p 184).

Length, 17 ft. 6 in.

of the day to accomplish the task ; but even with the disadvantage of the stench the work was most interesting. When all was finished it was time to return, and having thoroughly cleansed the vertebræ and jaws, and taken them out on to the yacht, I returned to find Lady Brown at peace with the world and fast asleep ; but when I congratulated her on having a good rest she vowed she had never closed her eyes.

The people had very kindly provided me with a little shed (some distance away from the hotel !), and in this museum my exhibits were rapidly accumulating. I found the removed jaws, vertebræ, etc., dried splendidly here, which was really very helpful. This little shed almost hung on the edge of some big rocks which fell straight down to the sea, in height about 25 feet. Whenever I visited here, and looked down, I always noticed in the pool below numbers of different fish, so instead of going out fishing next day, I took my light rod down and sat on the edge and fished. I had quite good sport, getting a number of pan-fish, which were cooked for us by the hotel proprietor—in fact, I think they all partook of my fish that evening.

It was just about this time I received a letter from Dr. Casey, a well-known veterinary surgeon in Texas, whom I had met some time previously, saying that he was very interested in my work amongst these big fish, and would like to come down from Texas, stay at the hotel, and go out with me for the purpose of examining scientifically the captured specimens, and at the same time the sporting editor of the *Star and Herald* (John K. Baxter) in his columns rather pulled my leg over the reports they were getting about these big fish. Up to that time Baxter and I had not met. I wrote to the paper giving him an open invitation to come over to Taboga and have a go at them with me, so that he would actually witness the operations and would thus be able to describe the fishing more accurately than he could from the undoubtedly sensational reports he was receiving.

When my letters appeared in the *Star and Herald*, he added a few lines of editorial comment in which he said he was going to take advantage of my sporting offer, and intended to go over to Taboga, and would publish his actual experiences. The upshot of it was that I ran over to Balboa in the *Cara*, and brought him over. This was the beginning of a friendship which I hope will always last, for he proved to be one of the best fellows I have ever met, and we subsequently spent many hours together. I cannot do better than publish an extract from the *Star and Herald* of what he wrote the day he arrived at Taboga :

" I may have to go out one day and catch a shark with Mitchell Hedges. I'm not exactly yearning for that. I have no grievance against the sharks. They never did anything to me. Besides, I think it may be a frame-up. Mitchell Hedges would like to see me hook something and then get all the skin burned off my hands when I tried to hang on to the line. In that case I would not be able to punch a typewriter any more, and he could live in peace without being annoyed by scurrilous squibs in the newspaper. These Englishmen are sometimes deeper than you think they are."

The day after Mr. Baxter arrived at Taboga, Mr. Typaldos, the manager of the *Star and Herald*, also joined us, coming over from Panama in his motor-boat. I therefore planned that on the next morning we should all go out on a fishing expedition together. I was very glad that Mr. Typaldos had come, for now not only the sporting editor but also the manager of Panama's leading paper would be able to see exactly the tackle I was using for the capture of these great fish, and also the *modus operandi*. It is unnecessary for me to say that I was most anxious any reports that appeared in the press should be absolutely accurate, as the stories which were being spread about by the natives as to the size of the fish I was catching were simply ridiculous. I noticed they always grew in the retailing, pounds becoming ultimately tons.

CHAPTER VI

A BATTLE-ROYAL BETWEEN BULL SAND-SHARKS—LADY BROWN NARROWLY ESCAPES AN AWFUL DEATH

EVERYTHING being in readiness and an amply supply of bait secured, we left in the yacht for what I hoped would be a great day's sport. The start was most auspicious, for as we neared Taboguilla, into the air sprang a big sand-shark, to fall back with a thud and burst of water. I saw Baxter and Typaldos look at each other.

"They're here all right," I said; "this is only the commencement."

"Do you mean to tell me you can land a fish that size?" asked Baxter.

"The one you've just seen jump into the air," I replied, "only weighed about two hundred and fifty or three hundred pounds. Now, having seen that, just draw on your imagination and picture what one weighing fourteen hundred and sixty pounds and measuring fourteen feet nine inches in length would be like."

It was only by conjuring up a picture of the relative sizes that they could realise the dimensions of some of the fish I had caught.

"Good Lord!" said Typaldos, "it seems impossible!"

"Well, I hope," I answered, "that you'll have an actual demonstration of a real big one, and see how the capture of it is accomplished." And as if the sea was determined to provide for their especial benefit a real display, as we travelled along inshore close to the island, into the air rose a large, flat, dark mottled mass, returning to the water with a tremendous smash.

"I think there's an exhibition to-day," I said to them; "that was a whip- or leopard-ray. It probably weighed somewhere about a hundred and fifty pounds."

Turning to me, Baxter said:

"Do you know, although I've lived here for a number of years, I'd no idea the sea round here held all these fish. It's most surprising."

However, a still more amazing spectacle awaited us. We had hardly dropped anchor off Taboguilla Point, my usual fishing-place, when what I had always longed to see, but never had, took place within 50 yards of the boat. A battle-royal started. It was no doubt the breeding season. A number of the males were evidently all desirous of wooing the same beautiful female, and inflamed with desire, proceeded to give us an ocular demonstration of savagery in its most primitive form. At least twelve to fifteen bull sand-sharks appeared on the surface and engaged in one of the most ruthless fights that it is possible to imagine. There was no sign of cowardice on the part of any, but only the utmost ferocity. Rushing, tearing, and rending one another, ripping out chunks of flesh, thrashing the water with their tails, the spray and spume flying in every direction, it was a veritable butchery. For at least a hundred yards around the water was red with blood. Slowly, one by one, they became eliminated from the fray. If there was ever a victor, he must have been so terribly maimed and mutilated as—I should imagine—to be no longer attractive to the lady of his choice; but my opinion is that not one was left alive, for it could easily be seen, by many fins dotting the surface, that other shark were eagerly awaiting to devour the wounded and dying as they dropped out of the struggle. In a fight like this, any that did survive would be so enfeebled as to become an easy prey to those who had not taken part in the sanguinary conflict.

This battle must have lasted for a good half-hour, and we had a splendid view the whole time.

I turned to Baxter and Typaldos.

"Do you think you'd like to have a bathe here?" I asked; but I'll swear that after what they had just seen nothing would ever tempt them to indulge in a dip in this vicinity.

All signs of the fight had disappeared—the sea resumed its placid calm—except for an occasional burst of water from leaping sand-sharks, etc. On either side of the boat I thereupon ran out one of the small lines, generously baited with a Spanish mackerel. Baxter took one, and Typaldos the other. I carefully explained to them that on having a strike, they must on no account tighten the line immediately, but just let the slack run freely through their hands for about 20 yards—then haul back with all their strength. If ever I had cherished the evil design of skinning Baxter's hands by the friction of the line through them, I at once recognised him to be such a good sportsman that any scheme of this sort was immediately and for ever tabooed. Both men wore leather gloves, but my own hands had become so toughened that I found I could dispense with these.

Within a few seconds Baxter yelled:

"My line's running away!"

"Don't tighten!" I cried. "Wait a minute."

Running through his hands, 20 yards disappeared almost quicker than it takes to write.

"Now strike for all you're worth," I shouted.

He did. Now, Baxter is a big man, and not exactly what one would call slim, weighing (I should think) in the neighbourhood of 200 pounds, and I don't suppose he ever had a worse shock in his life when, with a look of "do or die" on his face, he gripped that line and struck. There was an awful jerk on the line, and I just seized the back of his coat in time to prevent his being shot overboard. But his blood was up, he had caught the fever, and he fought that fish with a vengeance, throwing his whole weight into the fight. Every now and again, when a particularly fierce rush took place, I would hear murmurs in connection with the shark's

ancestors—also a few scientific remarks concerning where it came from and where it was likely to go : these sporting editors are a terrible lot !

He handled that fish to the bitter end—yes, and without assistance, and when thoroughly exhausted, it was brought alongside the boat. I am prepared to bet, like General Pershing, he reckoned it the greatest day of his life ! The perspiration was streaming from him and his face was the colour of a boiled lobster. I am glad to take this opportunity of recording what he looked like, as he was once very rude to me in his sporting columns about my shorts. But what did he care for his appearance ? He had caught his first big fish, and I am sure it will live in his memory for ever.

Suddenly off went Typaldos's line. Now, he knew a bit about fishing, having therefore some advantage over poor Baxter, who was lying back in the boat, looking like a piece of chewed string. On striking, an iron mask seemed to settle over his countenance, his lips were tightly compressed, the fighting blood of his ancestors rose, and he battled grimly, cheered on meanwhile by gratuitous advice from Baxter ; but he handled his fish in a really sportsmanlike fashion, and after a most exciting struggle played his opponent out.

When both fish were placed side by side on board, there was really not much difference in size—I should think they weighed round 280 pounds each, but I am sure for the rest of their lives each of them will swear that their own was the larger.

Now having bait for the big lines, I proceeded to run these out, and once more the uncertainty of fishing was evinced. I cannot do better than quote from an article in the *Star and Herald*, written in his own inimitable style by Baxter himself :

“ We had visions of hauling in sharks all day at the rate of one every ten minutes, but these remained visions only. As a matter of fact, although we fished until 5.30 in the afternoon, we caught nothing more. We had runs enough—fifteen to be exact—but each

time our shark, after being securely hooked to all appearance, contrived to get away before we could drag him alongside. I hesitate to say too much about the size of these fish we did not catch: they were all huge—in fact each one was a little larger than the last. The final nibbler, hooked for a minute by Mr. Mitchell Hedges, must have been a leviathan. We could not see these fellows, mind you, but we could tell by the way they pulled and the things they did to our hooks that they were monsters. Mitchell Hedges considered it a poor day's fishing, but I am a moderate man. To tell the truth I am only mildly interested in sharks—they are ugly brutes of no great intelligence [I rather disagree with the erudite writer on this point.—F. A. M. H.], and after they have been killed and exposed for a few hours they do not smell like the perfumes of Araby."

That's what Baxter thought about it; but on our return we all agreed we had had a jolly good day, and if we had not caught the monsters, they had given us a good sporting run, and were still left to battle with some day or other—and there's always a to-morrow.

To-morrow gave us an example of the habits of the shark family which I shall always remember, and showed by ocular demonstration, far better than any theories, the considerable danger of standing or remaining motionless in seas infested by these creatures. Baxter was not with us this time, and I do not know whether it was his strenuous exertions of the previous day or the lure of a particularly seductive arm-chair that prevented him joining us, but Mr. De Ossa, of Panama City, Lady Brown, Typaldos, and myself constituted the party. This time we did not go to Taboguilla, but on leaving our mooring at Taboga rounded Morro Island, and running close inshore on the mainland side of Taboga, on reaching the western extremity, proceeded across the bay to the island of Melones, where we dropped anchor just off the little sandy beach. It was a tremendously hot day even for

the tropics, and although we fished for some time here, our efforts were only rewarded with one sand-shark weighing about 240 pounds. Ever since our arrival, the tide had been ebbing rapidly, and was now almost low water. Knowing Lady Brown was very keen on collecting shells, Mr. Typaldos, who shared the same tastes, went ashore with her in the dinghy, leaving De Ossa and me on the yacht to continue our fishing, but there was nothing doing. The surface of the water was entirely undisturbed—not even a school of friendly porpoises to break the monotony. I must confess the heat and environment out here were not conducive to energy, so we both placidly lolled under the white awning of the yacht, peacefully smoking, while the lines remained motionless in the water. We could see Lady Brown and Typaldos prowling about, every now and again stooping to pick up something. I rather think we were envious of their energy.

We were only anchored about 40 yards off shore—together I suppose we must have been about a hundred yards away. Lady Brown was standing quite still in about 9 inches of water, bending down with her back to the sea, evidently examining something on the bottom, when to our amazement and horror we saw a big black fin making straight towards her. Right inshore it travelled, and it was easy to see her bare legs were the attraction.

“Great God!” I said to De Ossa, “it’s going to attack her!”

Right up on to the sand it swam, almost wriggling, while she remained totally oblivious of her danger. Simultaneously we roared with the utmost strength of our lungs:

“Don’t move! Look behind you—for God’s sake don’t step back!”

The fear in our voices travelling across the water made her realise she was in mortal danger, and with wonderful presence of mind, without moving her body an inch, she turned her head. The entire dorsal fin

and back of the big fish was out of the water, its waiting mouth could not have been more than 3 feet from where she was standing. Had she made one step backwards, the consequences would have been too awful to contemplate, and the horror of it would have remained with us all our lives. As it was, De Ossa and I were actually sweating in an agony of fear, and it is impossible to describe how our pent-up feelings were relieved when we saw her advance calmly on to the dry beach.

I think this was the most awful position I have ever been in—to see a person almost in the jaws of death, and, owing to the distance, being utterly unable to do anything to prevent a terrible catastrophe.

Having reached terra-firma, she turned round, but the brute took not the slightest notice, being utterly devoid of fear. Typaldos had run up on hearing our shouts, and picking up a huge piece of rock, hurled it at the damnable creature, which almost disdainfully retreated from the shore, its dorsal fin remaining above the surface.

"De Ossa," I said, "I'm going to get that fish."

"I'm with you," he replied.

Taking one of our largest hooks and lines, we baited with a huge lump of the sand-shark we had caught, and rowing in, ran the line out about 40 yards off shore from the exact spot where it had been waiting to attack Lady Brown. The dinghy had hardly returned from dropping the bait before an ominous movement on the line told more plainly than words could speak that this voracious creature had not gone away but had remained lurking in the vicinity. Away went the line; we had fastened one end of it round a huge rock, and all of us, seizing the rope, struck hard. We lurched forward under the shock and could not have held it had it not been fast to the great mass of stone, which was beyond the power of anything to move.

As far as this fish was concerned we all felt vindictive. No quarter or mercy was given, and as quick as we could finish off the job we brought it to the beach. What a

pleasure it was to think that this time when it came up on the sand, instead of attacking, it would be attacked with a .303 expanding bullet, for we had brought the rifle ashore with us. Crack!—and again! One great thrash of its tail, a convulsive quivering, and that was the end of this fish tiger.

By straining and tugging inch by inch, having now been joined by Robbie and the boy from the yacht, we managed to work it on to the beach, where we photographed it, together with its intended victim.¹

I mentioned previously in this book the danger of standing or floating in waters where sharks abound, and here was a definite illustration of how easily a tragedy might happen. It is not an isolated instance. Only a very short time after this one of a party who had come over to Morro Island on a picnic was wading on the sand-spit which joins it with Taboga. This bar is only about 100 to 130 yards long, bare at low water, but covered about 4 feet at high tide. He was standing still, and having on a bathing costume, his white legs beneath the water were evidently a tempting bait. Suddenly several natives, who are nearly always to be found here, started shouting and shrieking in their native tongue that a shark was coming towards him. He quickly realised his danger, and frantically made for dry land. This fish, which was one of the tiger-shark species, then literally dashed after him, almost hurling itself on the beach in its mad endeavour to seize its prey, and he only escaped by the skin of his teeth.

One could go on giving similar instances, such as that of a Naval man, close inshore off the island of Otoque, about 15 miles away, who shortly before this had one of his legs severed completely just below the knee and died before he could get medical attention.

My advice to all visitors to the tropics is this—always remember not to stand or float in waters which are known to contain sharks. This injunction should be religiously remembered.

¹ Photograph faces page 196.

After the exciting time we had passed through, I do not think any of us wanted to do any more fishing, so we idled away the rest of the day, and afterwards returned to Taboga to relate our experiences as a warning to all. Typaldos agreed with me that if anybody had written up an incident like this for his newspaper he would have hardly liked to publish it, so fantastic would the story appear ; but I know we had been given a lesson that none of us will ever forget.

Before Baxter and Typaldos returned to Panama we caught some more fish, and I know by what they wrote after their return that never before had they fully realised the mysteries of the deep and the strange life that dwelt therein. It also gave them an insight into the dangers and hard work connected with this branch of fishing, which only their personal experience could have brought home to them.

I was very sorry when they went back, for they had proved real companions and equally good sportsmen ; and, as I said before, our being together on these trips was the commencement of a friendship which I hope will always continue.

CHAPTER VII

MY LINES ARE SMASHED UP—ANOTHER FIGHT WITH A
BIG SHOVEL-NOSE—MY RIGHT LEG NEARLY LOST

THREE days after Baxter and Typaldos had left I got two more big shovel-nose sharks—a male and a female. One weighed nearly 1,200 pounds, and the other just over a thousand. Before we had finished fighting them, got them attached to our stern capstan and towed back to Taboga, it was nearly dark, so I beached them in a little cove quite close to the hotel, tying them up securely with a three-quarter-inch rope, but, like an idiot, forgot the tide was not fully in, and that, naturally, when it rose they would be quite covered.

Next morning, arriving to commence the usual autopsy, I found to my amazement one had completely disappeared, the rope being severed as if cut by a razor, while the other had been bitten completely in two close up to the head. This is another instance of how these mighty fish come right close in to the shore and devour their prey; and it shows too that in these waters you can never afford to be careless. Many times I had myself waded about in this little cove, never imagining that big fish would come in here.

Where my two sharks had been torn to pieces was quite close to the pontoon, so towards evening it occurred to me to try running out the shark-lines from there, and about 5.30 p.m. I started fishing. I first ran out a couple that I used for catching sand-sharks, the bait being red snappers, weighing about 8 pounds each. It was not long before I had a strike. I picked up the line, first letting it run through my hands, and hauling back, drove the hook well home, to be almost shot into the



AUTOPSY ON 1,460-LB. SHOVEL-NOSE SHARK (p. 160)



SHARK THAT CAUSED THE TROUBLE (p. 230).
Weight, 1,200 lb.



LADY BROWN, MR TYPALDOS, AND ROBBIE, WITH THE SHARK THAT NEARLY
CAUSED A TRAGEDY (p 194)



TWO SHOVEL-NOSE SHARKS (p 196).
Weights, 1,200 and 1,000 lb.

water immediately. I let go the line like lightning, for I knew by the terrific rush I was not fast into a sand-shark. Out ripped the slack. I had fastened the end of the line to a bolt-ring. When its end was reached—twang!—it snapped as if it was a piece of cotton. I need not comment on what force it requires to break a virtually new quarter-inch manilla line! This will give a slight idea what the strength of a big fish is like.

Within five minutes the second line began to disappear. I felt it gingerly, after the experience I had just had, being a little uncertain whether it was a sand-shark or not. It was not, so I let the line go until it came up with a jerk, being also fastened to the bolt-ring. I quite expected the same thing to happen as with the other, but though submitted to tremendous tension, it held valiantly. I was all alone at the time, and could do simply nothing in the way of playing the fish, so leaving it to its own devices, I went and hunted out Robbie, who, as usual when he had nothing to do, was playing craps—i.e. pitching dice—with other sons of sunset. He came down with me and between us we did the best we could.

It must have been quite an hour and a half, and was pitch dark before we beached that fish. I was amazed to find it was a sand-shark after all, but it weighed well over 500 pounds. This time I did not make the mistake of leaving it in the shallow water, where during the night other sharks would get it, but with the help of one or two others, hauled it up on the beach.

The next day we made up our minds to explore the island, and as Robbie had nothing to do I let him have three of my lines to fish with. By this time he had become quite as keen as we were. I exhorted him not to go out in a boat by himself or do anything foolish like that, but to fish from the pontoon, where, if necessary, he could get help; so we went off and spent the day wandering about the island and its shores on one of our collecting expeditions. When we returned,

this black "scoundrel" met us with the most lugubrious expression that I think I have ever seen on a human countenance.

"What's the matter?" I enquired.

"Oh, Boss, everything all wrong."

I at once looked out towards where the yacht was anchored, imagining that perhaps something had happened to the boat, but there she was, rolling gently.

"What the devil is the matter with you?" I enquired.

"All the lines are gone, Boss," he groaned.

"Gone where?" I asked with some asperity.

"Big fish took them one after the other, Boss—smashed all three off the pontoon."

How I wished to goodness I had never let him go fishing! Losing the lines at this rate, it looked as if I should soon have to go to Balboa and get fresh tackle. As far as I was concerned, that finished my ambition to use my lightest shark-lines in this particular spot.

We always anchored our yacht in the little sandy bay, 60 or 70 yards out off the end of the dock. Some friends of ours, Mrs. Taylor and her little son Surse, had come over from Colon, so we spent most of the following day with them, and in the afternoon, not having much to do, I thought I would go out and try fishing off the boat. I put off alone in the dinghy, got on board, and, fishing with a sand-shark line, soon caught one of these fish. Bearing in mind the episode of Robbie losing the three lines the evening before, and having plenty of bait, I thought I would have a turn with one of the big lines, more for something to do than anything else. I had not stopped to think how, being quite alone, I should manage if I hooked a big fish—and big fish were there all right, for very shortly the slack began to disappear off the deck. Usually I am most careful, but this was one of my absent-minded days. I struck—an asinine thing to do—on the heavy tackle.

As the fish felt the hook it made a violent plunge. My legs shot from under me and my head hit the deck with a terrific crack. Mercifully I was not entangled in the now out-rushing line, which jerked up on the capstan with a thud that quivered the yacht. The shock had almost stunned me, and when I staggered to my feet once more I began to wonder what the devil I should do. I tried hauling on the taut line—quite uselessly ; but after straining ahead for some time the fish suddenly swam straight back in towards the boat, and, taking advantage of this manœuvre, I regained a considerable amount of line, to which I then gave two turns round the capstan, thus restricting the movements of my friend somewhere down in the depths.

This fish was indeed a fighter, but after dashing and plunging wildly on the now shortened line, unexpectedly the chain over the bow of the yacht rattled violently, while the line became quite slack. I went to the bow and looked over the side. There about 15 feet below the surface, I saw that the huge brute had swum round and round it, and its enormous strength had actually torn the anchor from the bottom, so that the yacht was adrift. I was completely helpless. I called as loudly as I could, expecting help from the shore. Nobody, apparently, had noticed the struggle that had been going on ; but now I saw little Surse Taylor and a boy friend of his, paddling out to me in a cayuca. They got on board; but although we all three did our best the task of disentangling the line from the chain was hopeless. The fish was tugging savagely below the whole time. Looking over the side, the three of us could distinctly see it biting madly in an effort to rid itself of the firmly embedded hook. The boys were shouting and wildly waving their arms to attract attention, and I was glad to see four men put off in a boat to come to what had really become a rescue. With their help we commenced to unwind the end of the line from round the chain—goodness knows how many times the shark had circled this, but it certainly seemed a never-

ending job, and during the time it took we had steadily drifted out into deep water. Robbie on shore had now also seen our plight, and came out. With our combined efforts the shark, which was now exhausted, was ultimately brought alongside, to be finished off by the rifle, and after fastening it to the stern of the boat we started up the engine, and once more moored our boat in the usual place.

We made quite a procession towing that fish ashore. The rope round it was first taken by the men in the boat, passed on to Robbie in his, then on to me in the dinghy, and finally to the two boys in their cayuca, for they refused to be left out of the fun. When beached it proved to be another shovel-nose, weighing between 1,150 and 1,200 pounds, and nearly $13\frac{1}{2}$ feet in length. Although the four men who helped me catch it had planned to return to Panama that night, they all stayed over so that they could have their photograph taken with it the following day.

I think there must have been a curse on that afternoon's fishing, for directly attributable to the capture of this shark, the most serious accident that I have ever met with in tropical seas befell me. After dissecting my fish, I was always very careful to have the entrails, carcase, etc., towed well out, for the simple reason that it would only be a question of a few hours in the humid heat before decomposition set in, and a great bulk of flesh rotting in the sun would fill the air for a long way round with an appalling stench. On this occasion, having finished my work, I was hauling the liver (which floats) out into the shallow water, so that it might drift away. Young Taylor and his friend had meantime been watching with great interest the cutting open of the fish they had helped to capture. As previously stated, I only wore shorts out here, my legs being quite bare. I had dragged the liver into the sea, with the water about reaching to my knees, and was just letting it go when I felt a stab, followed by an acute shooting pain. I called out to the boys that something had

struck me in the leg. The little chaps thought it was a shark and were awfully concerned, but I knew it was not. I quickly got to the beach, and looked at the calf of my leg where I had been struck. Beyond a small puncture I could see nothing, but took the precaution of at once bathing the spot with hot water and painting it with iodine.

I now commenced to suffer the greatest pain, my leg swelling rapidly—so much so that when I attempted to remove my shoes, the agony was so acute that the one on the foot of the bad leg had to be cut off. The swelling proceeded upwards to the groin, the glands of which also became affected. The pain crept up the right side and the glands under the arm became enlarged. All through the night I suffered intensely, and in the morning was virtually paralysed down the whole of my right side. I was utterly unable to move, and Lady Brown went to Balboa in the yacht to fetch a doctor, who was able, however, to do very little. Where the calf of the leg had been punctured there was now a vivid orange patch, with an outer circle of angry inflammation. For the next few days I experienced Hades—the orange patch turned a deep purple and the inflammation spread from foot to knee. It began to look as if I were going to lose my leg, but slowly the swelling in the glands under the arm and groin commenced to subside, and an awful, never-ceasing throbbing centred in my calf, and I quickly realised that an abscess was forming.

By the application of hot fomentations literally day and night, it ultimately came to a head, and I shall pass over what I finally went through when the doctor lanced it. It was over three weeks from the time I was struck before I was able to put my foot to the ground again, and I considered I got off lightly.

Beyond question, the fish that had caused all this trouble was a very small sting-ray. I recollected afterwards I had noticed off the pontoon a day or two before this happened several of them moving along the bottom,

but being so small—possibly 12 or 14 inches long—I had not bothered about them.

This was yet another example of the dangers of tropical waters. If a small specimen was so poisonous as to affect a man in the pink of condition in this way, what would have happened to a child ?

CHAPTER VIII

THE PEARL ISLANDS—FIVE HOURS' BATTLE WITH A SAND-SHARK

It was shortly after this that we determined to run out to the Pearl Islands, situated in the Pacific about 50 miles from Panama City and 45 miles from Taboga. This curious group of islands and banks has long been the centre of an extensive pearl-fishing industry, and some really beautiful pearls are obtained from the oysters here, one found early in 1923 being valued at over £20,000. The principal islands in this group are Rey, Pedro Gonzales, and San José, with innumerable smaller ones dotting the sea in the vicinity. All around here magnificent fishing is to be had. Anybody going out in a motor-boat and trolling a couple of lines behind can always get at least 500 pounds of good-eating fish in a day, and it is not exceptional to find the bag run to well over a thousand pounds. As usual with ocean fishing, there is the drawback of bad weather suddenly coming up. The navigation, too, is very dangerous, tides running strongly, and unexpected rocks rising from the sea needing ceaseless vigil while one is at the wheel. Possibly the finest ground of all for the fishing is the San José Bank, situated east-south-east of Cocos Point, the most southerly extremity of Rey Island. The sea here nearly always presents a most remarkable sight—vast quantities of fish as far as the eye can reach smashing the surface, while porpoises and dolphins and frequently large schools of whales come right close to the boat. It is really a most interesting spectacle to see ten or twelve of the latter, huge mammals, rising to the surface, blowing

their steam-like jets into the air ; and anyone lucky enough to see the cows playing with their young will never forget the sight—their clumsy antics are most ridiculous. They seem to toss their progeny clear of the water every now and again with their mammoth tails. Sharks are also here in abundance, but it is while one's attention is momentarily distracted by these interesting details that the ever-lurking danger of the hidden rocks becomes a *fait accompli*.

Early in 1923 a motor-cruiser called the *Polaris*, with about eight people on board, proceeded to these islands for a week-end fishing-trip, and caused great anxiety by not returning as expected. No news of any sort was obtainable, so the United States Government sent out boats to search, and at last the party was located on one of the smaller islands and taken off. The *Polaris* had run on one of the rocks and very shortly after had disappeared. It was rather a sad case, because the boat in question was the sole property of one of the men, and being uninsured, he had to bear the entire loss.

Probably the best anchorage in this group is at Saboga, a little island to the extreme north, rising about 250 feet at its highest. There is a most interesting native village here, the people being very kindly and hospitable, always willing to help in every way the adventurer who sails into this place. In this vicinity I believe (although I have never caught one) is the home of truly gigantic sword-fish. Many a tale of woe have I heard from the natives who have lost their tackle by accidentally hooking one of these big fish, but I have never yet heard of one being landed, and on the occasion of my visit here the weather was so vile that to attempt to fish for them, or anything else, was out of the question. In fact, not long after our arrival, climatic conditions were so bad that the primary thought was how to return. On the first lull in the wind we ran for it as hard as we could back to the safety of our anchorage at Taboga, and glad we were, for it blew half a gale

for several days afterwards, to be followed by a dead calm. We took advantage of this to run out to the islands of Otoque and Bona—a distance roughly of 15 miles from Taboga. These islands are very picturesque, with a splendid spectacle on the ocean side of Bona—mighty Pacific rollers smashing against the rocky sides and bursting over a hundred feet into the air. The fishing also leaves nothing to be desired. There are several quiet places where one can anchor, and red snappers, yellow-tails, and in fact most fish indigenous to these waters, can be caught in numbers.

The little village on Otoque, typically Spanish, is most interesting, as are the people, while one or two wonderful marine caves, together with the island's natural charm, make a visit well worth while. On this occasion we trolled continuously, catching several fine jack running up to about 40 pounds each, and prominent among a bag of about sixteen red snappers was a splendid specimen weighing 55 pounds—altogether a most sporting day.

After our return to Taboga, before once more going after the giants, we made up our minds to see what fishing with our heaviest rods would yield in the passage between Urava and Taboga. Anchoring the yacht in almost the identical place in which we had captured the huge hammer-head, I rowed out in the dinghy into the channel. As I previously explained, quite a current runs through here, and baiting with a nice piece of Spanish mackerel, as the boat gently drifted I cast out, letting the tempting lure slowly sink to the bottom, now and then slowly raising it up and down, creating an attractive motion. I was getting rather weary of the monotony when I was rewarded with a smashing strike. Away went the fish, making for a reef of rocks submerged some distance beneath, and had it not been for the strength of my tackle, it would have gained its objective, undoubtedly smashing me up; but by applying the brake as hard as I could, I managed to stop the rush before the danger-zone was reached, and

manœuvred it away into the deeper water. It put up a splendid fight, and I was presently rewarded by bringing alongside my cockle-shell of a boat a splendid specimen of a red snapper, which I ultimately managed to gaff after considerable difficulty, and get over the side without, as I had feared, overturning the dinghy. After rowing back to the yacht it proved to weigh just over 72 pounds.

"Come along," I said. "I've schemed another way to catch the big ones." Lady Brown did not require much persuasion to join me after seeing what I had brought back, and we rowed out to the place where I had struck the red beauty. While I sat facing the stern of the dinghy pulling, she sat looking towards me, turned partly sideways, with the rod pointing behind her. The bait was exactly the same as I had previously used, and giving her an idea how to raise it every now and then lightly in the water at intervals, we drifted with the tide. A long time elapsed, and nothing happened, and she was getting tired of holding the heavy rod.

"I think the way you caught that fish was a pure fluke."

"Don't you believe it," I replied; "I've caught one like it, and there isn't any reason why we shouldn't get another!"

Time went on and there was no sign of a bite.

"I've had en——" she was going to say "enough," but never finished the word. A look almost of horror came over her face—the point of the rod bent over, and if she had not been gripping it with both hands it would undoubtedly have been torn from her, as the brake was on pretty hard. Leaning over I gave it a few more twists, for the line was being torn off at a great pace, and I quickly saw the difficulty we were in, for this fish was considerably larger than my 72-pound red snapper. Lady Brown's cramped position at the end of the boat made the playing of it extremely difficult for her.

"It's almost wrenching my shoulder out!" she gasped; but I could render no assistance, for any violent movement in our tiny craft would have resulted in our turning turtle.

"Slide into the bottom," I said, "and kneel down facing astern."

It was easier said than done, but she managed it after some difficulty. All this time I was backing the boat as hard as I could in the direction in which the fish was travelling, but in spite of the heavy brake-pressure, the line was obviously coming near the end. Working my hardest I backed harder and harder.

"I'm afraid it's no use," she wailed. "I simply can't hold it; it's agony in this position."

"Whatever you do, hang on for a few minutes," I said; "we don't want to lose all that tackle."

The situation had become desperate. I could see that she was quite helpless, so, as a last resource, I pulled the oars in, and using the greatest care, managed to reach her, relieving her of the rod. Originally there were 300 yards of 54-thread line on the reel, and there certainly could not have been more than twenty left when I took on the fight. Do or die! I jammed the brake on full strength, gambling everything on the hope that the line would be strong enough to stand the strain.

Our light craft up till now had been pulled by the fish stern first, so creeping up forward while she remained aft, I manoeuvred so that we should be towed by the bow, after which we were much happier, though the fish was taking us where it would; but after over three-quarters of an hour of this, my back and arms were aching terribly, so with the utmost caution she crept up and relieved me of the rod, while I took her place in the stern.

We neither of us had the faintest idea what this big fish could be. Four times we repeated the operation of taking the rod from one another; over two hours had passed since first striking into the fish, which still showed no signs of exhaustion, and by this time we had been

carried over five miles from the yacht. Many times we had signalled and shouted to Robbie and the native on board, but might as well have spared ourselves the trouble for all the notice that was taken ; they were apparently quite oblivious of our plight.

We had passed through the channel between Urava and Taboga, were now out in the main ocean, and soon the islands cut off our view from the yacht.

"What the devil are we going to do?" I said. "I can't think why they haven't seen our predicament from the boat. Now they won't be able to see us, and they'll probably pull up the anchor and return to Taboga, thinking we've rowed back."

It was really a most alarming position. Fortunately there was hardly a ripple on the ocean—only long, smooth rollers, so we were in no danger of being capsized by a heavy sea ; but how long the brute we had hooked into would continue heading for Asia was entirely outside our knowledge.

Over three hours had passed, and the fish was still taking us farther out.

"This can't go on!" I panted. "If we ever do play the fish out, we could never tow it back to the yacht. I think I'd better cut the line."

"Oh, stick it a bit longer!" begged my companion. "After all this time it would be terrible to be beaten."

"Yes, but we're in a rotten position," I said ; "neither of us know what this fish is, nor how much farther it's going to tow us, and we're getting miles away from shore. If only those idiots on the boat would have the sense to come and look for us, we'd be all right. I know what's happened—they've gone fast asleep. For the Lord's sake take the rod again, and give me a rest—I'm whacked!"

She did, and after about ten minutes called out :

"It's weakening!" and as she spoke the fish changed its course, which up till now had been straight out to sea, and commenced to swim in a wide circle.

I now took the rod and gave all the butt I possibly

could, then started to pump the fish. Slowly I could feel that this was having an effect—I was regaining line. Harder and harder I worked—yes, undoubtedly it was coming in, but flesh and blood could not stand this for very long, and now it was Lady Brown's turn again. Alternately we laboriously sweated at our task—yard after yard of the line was being regained. Suddenly Lady Brown, who now had the rod, called out :

“ Can you see it ? ”

Sure enough, deep down in the clear water I could see a huge shape.

“ For God's sake don't reel in any more line,” I cried ; “ we've got to cut. We're fast into a big shark ! If we get it alongside and it strikes the side of the dinghy with its tail, it'll smash it like an egg ; and if that happens, nothing can save us out here.”

I had no rifle with me—or even a revolver. All we had was a gaff. The thought of cutting the line after the fight we'd had was really cruel, but I could see no alternative.

“ Let's hold it as it is for a little while longer,” pleaded Lady Brown ; “ if I can manage with the rod, you may be able to row the boat, and get to shore.”

“ Out of the question ! ” I retorted ; “ no human being in this world could row this dinghy with a fish that size behind, and in any case you could not hang on for long. I tell you there's only one thing to do, and that's make up our minds to part with the line.”

We sat arguing and debating over the difficulty. It really seemed too bad to be beaten like this, especially after playing the fish to a stand-still. Since first striking into it over four hours had elapsed, and we were both thoroughly exhausted. The heat, too, did not improve one's temper, especially when facing the obvious fact that after all we had gone through our efforts would be in vain. To see a fresh record on rod and line go west after actually winning the battle, was enough to irritate a saint.

Meantime, against all my wishes, she had been working

the shark still nearer to the boat. It was now in full view, and proceeded to give us a taste of what we might expect if it got any nearer, for sulkily it lunged downwards, the sudden pull nearly upsetting us.

"Don't be so obstinate," I said. "You know as well as I do that we can't land this fish. I'm going to cut the line."

I took out my knife.

"Wait!—wait!" she called out excitedly; "here comes the yacht!"

Never was I more glad to see anything in my life. Out from behind Urava, cutting the water at full speed, came the *Cara*. We had been missed at last, and they were searching for us.

I took over the rod, the poor little lady being absolutely all in. I at once let out a few more yards of line so that the fish might be clear of our little boat, for with help approaching I knew there was a good chance of our landing it, and was not taking any risk of a catastrophe happening at the last moment. Lady Brown was waving feebly to the yacht—they had evidently seen us and were bearing down towards us. When they came alongside we had almost to be lifted to the deck, so utterly spent were we both, and while the boy fastened the dinghy astern, Robbie took over the rod. The big fish appeared not to have a kick left in it, seeming thoroughly exhausted.

"Work it to the surface, Robbie, while I fetch my rifle," I said. "Now ease down that brake-pressure on the wheel, and look out for squalls when I fire—I don't want to make a mess of things at this stage of the game."

Smash! the bullet tore into the base of the skull. The shark plunged downwards in a death-dive, to be slowly worked to the surface again, feebly quivering.

"Now give me the rod," I said, "and you and the other boy get the gaff, and that pole with the iron hook. Drive them well home, then work the fish to the stern, and fasten it on to the capstan as usual."

This was easily done. I cut the line off short at the

wire lead, leaving the hook in the mouth, and away we went back to Taboga, towing the carcass behind us.

I went down to the cock-pit, to find Lady Brown, now the excitement was over, stretched out, completely prostrate. And I followed her example. It had taken over five hours from the time of first striking the fish to the time it was ultimately despatched and fastened to the stern of the yacht.

When we arrived home we were both too worn out to take much interest in the fish we had captured. I gave directions for it to be beached, and we went ashore. We were both feeling as if we had been beaten all over—there was not a muscle in our bodies that did not ache.

For sheer brutal exercise I know nothing that can compare with playing a big fish on a rod and line. There is no doubt it is a little too strenuous, and can cause serious organic injury, for the strain on the heart is tremendous.

Next day, though stiff and sorry for ourselves, we went to the beach to have a look at what we had caught, and it was not till then that I discovered what had happened to Robbie and the native that they had not seen our plight. As I had surmised, they had both gone fast asleep. We had gone through it with the shark the day before, and now they went through it from us!

On examining the creature that had given us this terrific fight, it proved to be a sand-shark, but much larger than any I had yet seen—in fact, I did not know they ran to this size. It weighed no less than 620 pounds, and on opening it, I discovered it was badly diseased. There is no doubt that if it had not been for this fact, we could never have landed it on rod and line. The whole time we were out here, we never got a larger one, and whenever we look at the vertebræ and jaws they will always bring back memories of the hours we were towed and the desperate plight we were in.

For a few days after this we both had to go easy, as we were so stiff we could hardly use our limbs.

"I've had enough of the rod and line," I said. "It's

too much " : and Lady Brown heartily agreed with me. I found the strain had once more affected my health and had to go to Panama to be medically treated—my heart was again giving me considerable trouble. The pumping and extra blood-pressure caused by hours of strenuous exercise had produced what is known as athletic heart, which I believe means there is a limit to what that usually willing organ can stand, and continual violent exertion causes it to lose its regular beat, which becomes intermittent. The doctors after examination once more impressed on me that I must take it easy, and that the human frame could not endure what I expected of it. The same remarks applied to Lady Brown, who had accompanied me to the clinic, so we made up our minds to stop all operations for a time until we were thoroughly rested.

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CHAPTER IX

AN ISLAND BLACK WITH BIRDS—OUR FIRST EXPERIENCES WITH THE HARPOON

IT is extraordinary how, after a day or two's enforced idleness, the lust of battle returns to you when you are a piscatorial enthusiast and are in waters which you know are teeming with worthy game ; but we were strong and refused to be tempted, and idled the time away, running out to various islands, where we basked on the sands. We found out that about 20 miles from Taboga there was a beautiful little bay on the mainland into which the Chamé River ran, and we determined to examine this thoroughly ; so at daybreak one morning we ran past Melones—the scene of the narrowly averted tragedy—crossing the broad stretch of main ocean between here and our goal. It is very difficult to see the entrance to this little bay, and we very nearly ran on a sand-bar in our efforts to locate it, which in the end we successfully did. Banks of pure white sand slope down to the water's edge, and running up what is really the broad mouth of the river, we dropped anchor about 50 yards from the beach and went ashore in the dinghy. Here we found a wonderful lot of shells, totally different from any we had yet seen, but the blaze of heat striking up off the nearly red-hot sand was terrific. Although my feet had become as tough as leather, I found it impossible to walk without shoes. We spent some time in searching here, and returning on board, made up our minds to visit the opposite shore, where towards the mouth is a little sandy island, and behind this we dropped anchor.

The weather looked very threatening in the distance,

and by the time we had finished our food, away to the east the clouds stretched black as ink.

"I don't think we'd better start back," I said, "until we see what's coming."

There were innumerable sea-birds in the neighbourhood, and for over an hour we were able to witness a most remarkable sight. There is no question but that an acute sense is possessed by the birds in this part of the world. We observed that they were gradually congregating on the little island behind which we were sheltering, persistently arriving in flocks great and small. We noticed that single birds continually left, flying off to be lost in the distance, and I cannot help thinking they were acting as guides or messengers to bring in all their outlying kith and kin. Cormorants, pelicans, gulls—faster and faster they gathered, skimming in across the water from every direction. The numbers on the island had now grown from thousands to hundreds of thousands, and still they came.

"There's trouble coming," I said. "The intuition of these birds is never wrong—they're sheltering here in the lee of the island because they know there's a great storm brewing."

All this time the blue-black mass was slowly advancing towards us, yet where we were the sun still shone brilliantly. It was a wonderful sight to see this wall advancing, broken all the while by streaks of lightning, and now, apart from the warning our feathered friends had given us, the merest child could have seen we were in for a real ripsnorter.

"Run out the other anchor, Robbie—I'll feel much happier," and this done, we waited for what was coming, making up our minds to remain, if necessary, all night where we knew we were safe. The sun had now become totally obscured, and a heavy silence, broken only by distant thunder, settled ominously over everything. In the meantime the little island had become so crowded with birds that there was hardly standing-room—they were jammed tight right down to the water's edge, and

even in the shallow water. Their arrival in ever-increasingly large flocks was continuous, and now we could see about 5 miles away a wall of water approaching, stretching from the heavens to the sea. It was just like an impenetrable curtain. Even at this distance one could hear the roaring of its fall—louder and louder the noise grew. The darkness was now as if night were approaching.

With a crash the avalanche of water burst on us—the noise was absolutely deafening—the whole world seemed to go mad. The little island with the birds, although not more than 30 or 40 yards away, was entirely blotted out. Up to now scarcely a breath of wind had ruffled the water—a most unusual occurrence; but it was not to remain long like this, for hard on the heels of the downpour the howling blast swept upon us. I was indeed glad we had put out the second anchor, for the little yacht was straining as if she must wrench free, to be blown helter-skelter whither the elements willed. With a startling suddenness the wind passed, as did much of the heavy rain, and we were now treated to a grand pyrotechnic display, the blue-black skies being rent and torn in every direction by vivid flashes of lightning, while the boom of the thunder seemed almost to shake the hills. I can conceive no finer spectacle than the awful majesty of a tropical thunder-storm. It is a demonstration of raging elements which has to be seen to be fully understood. The birds, which we could now dimly see again, looking almost like a solid mass on the island, had made no mistake in their premonition of what was coming, and I was indeed truly thankful we were not out at sea on our way home. The wind seemed to sweep down on one in waves, with a calm in between each, though the greatest force was when it first struck us in its hurricane passage.

The thunder and lightning must have lasted for over two hours before eastward the black wall seemed to part, a patch of blue sky appearing just as if one were looking from deep in the interior of a cavern out through the

entrance. The heavens shortly became quite clear of all cloud; rolling astern, the impenetrable wall of blackness passed on. The birds seemed thoroughly subdued, but when the sun shone out again, they shook themselves a few times, and then flew away to continue their interrupted search for food; and it was not long before we followed suit, getting up the anchors and starting off back to Taboga. There was quite a sea running, the aftermath of the heavy squalls, and no sooner had we left the shelter of the river-mouth than we commenced to pitch heavily, taking water over our bow; but this became less as we proceeded steadily ahead. By the time we were off Melones, night had fallen with that rapidity always experienced in the tropics, and as we picked up Taboga Island, we were treated to that curious optical illusion of appearing to be almost running ashore, whereas we were probably half a mile out. On arriving at our headquarters, we found the people very much perturbed, conjuring up all sorts of terrible things that they imagined might have happened to us. They were on the point of getting through to Balboa to ask the United States Government to send out one or two boats in case we might have been wrecked—and we probably should have been had we been away out in the open sea.

Since I had been warned not to fish with rod and line, as the undue exertion was playing the devil with my heart, I made up my mind to devote myself almost exclusively to fishing with the big hooks for the greater inhabitants, so once more resumed operations off Taboguilla; but although during the next two or three weeks I caught numbers of sand-sharks, from 250 to 350 pounds in weight, and shovel-nose running up to about 1,000 pounds, my luck was certainly dead out in actually landing a real monster. Time and again we were disappointed. Quite frequently here off Taboguilla I was having my lines severed above the chain—one morning having no less than three mighty strikes, the last actually towing the yacht for over two miles, but each time the

line was cut through, with a resultant loss of hooks and chains. I was therefore obliged to pay another visit to the government shops at Balboa for assistance, and to the new hooks they now made me I had longer chains forged.

For some time I had wondered what on earth it could be that was severing the lines like this. I could not bring myself to believe that it was always sharks, because the movements of the last fish that had towed us in its struggles to escape were quite unlike anything I had yet struck. It was only by finding out from the natives on Taboga that colossal saw-fish were reputed to inhabit our favourite fishing-water that I had an idea that they might be the cause of the trouble.

A day or two later a native came to see me, and asked me if I would like to catch one of these saw-fish. No need to record my reply. It was explained to me that there was only one way to do this. The combination necessary was a harpoon, dead low water, and no wind. There was one man, it appeared, in the village who was an expert at this sort of work and possessed everything necessary. Presently the old chap arrived in his flat-bottomed boat (called a panga), and we went down to have a look at his outfit.

A mangrove pole about 18 feet in length was fitted into the iron socket of the harpoon, and held in place by a half-inch manilla rope hitched round the top of the steel, pulled tight from here straight up the pole, and again hitched round the latter about 2 feet from the top. The end of the line, about 200 feet in length, was fastened round the forward seat of the panga. It was explained to me why it was only possible to go after these fish at dead low water and with no wind—the saw-fish were close inshore, and on the ebb tide lay in a depth of only about 12 feet. If there was any ripple, it was impossible to see them lying on the bottom; but if quite calm, by letting the boat drift gently over the locality where they lay, they could be plainly observed. The pole attached to the harpoon was then gripped, and

plunged down through the water, the iron entering deep into the body. The violent lunge and rush of the fish caused the pole to become detached from the iron socket, which remained in the fish with the rope hitched round it. The monster thereupon would proceed to tow the panga until finally exhausted, after which it was thought it could be beached, especially as I had a yacht, which might also be needed to come to the rescue in case of overturning or being attacked by an infuriated fish.

As we listened to these explanations, we conjured up fresh records, and were all eagerness to be off. The next day being fortunately favourable, away we went, towing our dinghy and the panga behind. Our harpoon expert had given us to understand that it would require four natives besides ourselves to tackle these giants, so we now numbered eight in all, which I imagined would be ample for any possible emergencies. We were both looking forward greatly to our day.

I now felt certain I had solved the problem of my cut lines. I believed that I had actually hooked some of these fish. The mouth, as will be seen from the photographs, is situated a long way back from the curious saw-like protuberance, and I surmise that the backward and forward smashing of the latter explained the parting that occurred in the stout manilla rope above the chain.

Our first experience after the saw-fish was doomed to disappointment. Although we drifted and paddled in ideal weather conditions, not a sign of a fish could we see ; but on an inquisitive shovel-nose shark approaching close to us, I had a demonstration of how this method of fishing worked.

The native expert, standing upright and balancing himself on the bow of the boat, ably seconded by the dexterous manipulation of the boatman, crept up to the slowly moving dark shape, which appeared thoroughly unconcerned and disdainful, and raising the pole high in the air, suddenly dashed it down through the water. He knew the steel had been driven well home in the creature, and jumped back with surprising agility,

squatting down in the bottom before the line, which was rushing out, reached the end, where it was fastened to the seat of the panga. With a jerk that nearly hurled one backwards, off we went. We had two rowers in the boat, and they both backed heavily on their oars, but in spite of this, with a curl of foam from the bow of the little flat-bottomed craft, away we shot. The excitement was tremendous, and I wondered if a fish of this size, which from the sight I had been able to obtain of it I judged to weigh about 900 pounds, could tow the little boat at this rate, what would happen if we struck a really big saw-fish, weighing, say, a couple of thousand pounds, as I understood that this was quite ordinary—in fact, I was informed that the majority of the monsters here were heavier than that.

Out to sea the fish rushed, the oarsmen backing water for all they were worth. There was nothing to be done except hope for the best, and wait till the first wild struggles had subsided. After half an hour it was evident that victory was ours—slowly but surely we began to work in towards shore. After running the boat aground, we all got out and started to heave on the line. When beached, it proved to be a male shovel-nose shark, weighing around 850 pounds, and without waiting for the tide to recede fully before opening it, I at once started my operations. As usual the blood, etc., floating out, attracted various relatives. So fearless are they when enticed by the smell that again in this instance they came right close in after the carcase, actually biting at the tail end of it, where the depth could not have been more than 2 feet. One big fellow of the sand-shark species was most persistent. Standing watchful, on a favourable opportunity presenting itself, when the fish became too daring, the harpooner drove his weapon well and truly home. Now we had some fun. We all held on to the rope like grim death. It smashed and lashed the water at the end of the tight line, dashing to right and left, but all to no avail, and presently we had the satisfaction of hauling it in on the beach. It

weighed about 450 pounds. A few minutes later a smaller one was treated in the same manner and quickly landed. There is no doubt we could have gone on *ad infinitum* getting sharks in this way, but I knew it would take me the rest of the day to open up the three we had, examine them, and remove the vertebræ, jaws, etc. The bodies, I knew, would provide a gorgeous feed when I had finished baiting up the ground, and would attract numbers of the shark family, and thus ensure excellent fishing for the next day or two.

My work over, we returned to Taboga, making up our minds to have another try after saw-fish next day ; but on our arrival, contrary to our belief that the carcasses would prove an attraction, the sea appeared deserted—no saw-fish—not even a sand-shark could be seen. However, there was always a to-morrow : if one were certain each time one went out of getting exactly what one went for, it would detract largely from the enjoyment of the chase.

CHAPTER X

WE HARPOON AND LAND A TON-AND-THREE-QUARTER SAW-FISH

THE two or three subsequent days were unfavourable for harpooning, so I once more resumed operations with my big lines, getting another shovel-nose shark, a magnificent specimen, weighing just over 1,300 pounds, and on the same day struck a monster fish. I knew by the tremendous shock and strain on the line that it was by far the heaviest I had ever smashed into. On the rope becoming taut, the yacht rode rapidly ahead, tearing up the anchor, which we hauled in as quickly as we could. After that we awaited developments. Round the point of Taboguilla this monster towed us, and out to sea.

"By Jove!" I said. "This is some fish! We're heading for the Pearl Islands. If ever we land this you'll see a sight that will stagger you!"

Lady Brown was intensely excited, for it was indeed a wonderful experience to be sitting in a 20-ton yacht towed by an unknown invisible force.

"I think we've got it firmly hooked this time," I said. "It may take hours, but I believe we'll get it in the end."

I had become rather confident of my heavy tackle, believing the extra length of chain attached to the hooks would put an end to the line being severed.

For over two hours this big fish towed us. Time and again we all gripped the line, but no man—nor twenty men—could have moved that fish an inch. The rifle was all ready—one might almost say the decks were

cleared for action, when at the height of our anticipation the line dropped slack. It was quite obvious what had happened—the fish had gone !

We pulled in the dangling line and were staggered to see what I am sure to many will appear past belief. Two inches from where the eye of the hook was fastened to the chain, the steel shank was bitten in two. It must be remembered that this was half-inch spring steel. It would seem impossible that anything could sever it, yet we had actually had on some marine leviathan that had gone through it as easily as if it had been a carrot. I kept the piece of steel and have shown it to many people. What the strength of jaw must have been to cut this through is beyond the imagination. Of course, one knows what the jaw-power of fish must be when they can sever a human thigh, shearing through flesh, muscle, and bone as clean as if cut by a razor. This with an adult (I believe I am correct in saying) requires a pressure of not less than one and a quarter tons, but to cut through flesh and bone is totally different from biting through half-inch spring steel. Once more I was brought face to face with the almost irresistible strength of the monsters of the deep.

Mr. Van Campen Heilner, in his book *The Call of the Surf*, describes how a heavy lead squid was bitten clean in half in this fashion about 12 to 14 miles off the Jersey coast by a tuna. It must be remembered that through the centre of the lead there would be the steel shank of the hook, so here once again is a demonstration of the almost unthinkable force of the great denizens' biting powers. Certainly there is nothing on land to-day that can equal it.

In the Essequibo River, and one or two other rivers in South America, a fish called the perai is so tremendously strong of jaw that although only 18 inches to 2 feet in length, it can sever a dog's leg. No cattle can swim the rivers where these voracious fish are, and there are records of men who have fallen out of a boat having the flesh so torn from their legs that, though

their rescue would be only a question of a few minutes, they were dead before they could be lifted out of the water.

I believe that fine sportsman the late Theodore Roosevelt encountered these fish in his exploration of the upper reaches of the Amazon. What strange life the waters hold ! Can there be anything more curious than the electric eel, that on contact produces its stunning effect—or the electric ray—both inhabitants of this part of the liquid globe ?

The loss of the fish in this unprecedented way was certainly a rude shock to my belief in my big tackle ; but, engaged in a work of discovery as we were, perseverance had always to be our motto. Nothing daunted, a day or two later we again went after saw-fish. Anchoring the yacht as usual, we entered the panga, which we always had to tow with us, as it was impossible to search for these fish without it. Reaching the locality where they should be, we proceeded to drift, looking eagerly over the side through the clear water, in the hope of seeing a shape outlined on the bottom. Suddenly the harpooner, who was standing up in the bow, called out in Spanish :

“ Back water ! ”

Excitedly he then cried :

“ Pull ahead hard ! ”

As our little craft shot forward, down went the long pole with its sharp steel weapon, plunged with his full strength towards the bottom. Momentarily I noticed that about 2 feet of the wood remained above the surface before, with a terrific rush, the line was tearing over the bow of the panga. There were four of us in the little boat, and seizing the rope, we expended our utmost strength to ease the shock before the end was reached, fearing the seat to which it was tied would be torn out with a wrench. The boat suddenly shot ahead so violently as to fling us all backwards on the bottom. Two of the natives immediately got out the oars and started to pull as hard as they could in the opposite

direction to the one in which we were travelling. In bad Spanish I asked :

“ What are we fast in ? ”

“ Large saw-fish,” was the reply.

I signalled to the yacht to start the engine up, so that they could follow us and render assistance if necessary.

Travelling at well over 6 knots an hour, the fish passed the rocky promontory, and now swam strongly in the direction of Flamenco Island, but soon changed its mind, and, as we could not help ourselves, we followed. In a semicircle it travelled, and now looked as if it was making for Taboga. It continued in this direction for some time, when once more it altered its course and proceeded almost straight back to where we had struck it. Arriving there, it at once started to sulk, hugging the bottom, nor could we dislodge it. We pulled and hauled together on the rope, but it made not the least impression—it refused to budge. There was only one thing to do—if the fish could play a waiting game, so could we.

After half an hour it commenced once more to swim slowly towards the shore. I suggested that if the yacht came alongside, we might pass the line up, and fasten the end of it round the capstan, and reverse our engines against the fish, but at once discarded the idea, realising that a pull like this would probably tear the harpoon out.

Alternately swimming and sulking, the fish was now only about 30 yards from the beach. We hauled the boat up short on the rope, until the huge brute was plainly visible only a few yards ahead of us, flush with the bottom. We had now plenty of slack line on board.

“ Try rowing ashore ! ” I cried, “ and fasten the end of the line round one of the big rocks ! ”

Here these rose up in pinnacles to the water's edge, intersected by minute sandy bays. This done, we all jumped out, and quickly tied the end securely.

Lady Brown, Robbie, and my other boy now left the anchored yacht in the dinghy and joined us, and we all commenced to haul slowly—foot by foot—nearer and nearer, when presently clear of the water rose the extraordinary weapon with which this fish is armed. At last we could get it no closer, so, fastening the line taut, we proceeded to wait for the tide to ebb. There was no further fight in the creature, which remained almost motionless, and as the water receded and the hideous head became visible, I smashed home two bullets, aiming for where I thought the heart must be. The brute gave one convulsive lunge, while a fountain of blood rose about 6 feet in the air from the bullet-holes. A few seconds after, it reared up, making a peculiar loud grunt—then came a terrific smash with its saw, after which it showed no further signs of life.

Later, when we could examine it thoroughly, it proved a weird-looking creature, measuring $24\frac{1}{2}$ feet in length and $17\frac{1}{2}$ feet in girth, and weighing $1\frac{3}{4}$ tons.¹ As usual, I spent the rest of the day in opening it, removing the saw in its entirety, and examining the inside. My bullet had found the heart all right, tearing it to pieces, causing what must have been instantaneous death; the way it rose up and struck down after being shot must undoubtedly have been caused by muscular contraction.

The vertebræ of this fish showed a decided difference from that of the shark, being of most peculiar construction, and the removal required much greater care, and presented difficulties that made similar operations on sharks seem child's play. However, it was ultimately accomplished, and when removed, the spine alone required two men to carry it.

The jaws of this fish have no teeth, and for a long time I was left much in doubt as to what its natural food consisted of. To a certain extent I subsequently discovered. The capture of this fish had seemed to me a comparatively simple operation—much easier, in

¹ Photograph faces page 230.

fact, than the fish we had encountered on the lines. We all discussed this, and the natives seemed much surprised at how little fight this one had put up, especially as it was a male of the species.

In course of conversation with the natives they gave me to understand that as a rule there was considerable danger in going after these big saw-fish. Only a year previously a boatman, having harpooned one, became entangled in the line as it rushed out, being torn out of the boat, and carried beneath the surface ; and had it not been for the almost superhuman feat of severing the rope with a knife that he carried in his belt whilst being pulled along under water, that unquestionably would have been the last of him.

They also told me many tales of how these creatures could overturn a boat with ease, while the striking force of their saw was simply tremendous. This I could well believe, if they put up a big fight ; but after seeing the tactics of the one we had just caught, I could not help wondering if they ever did put up a really strenuous battle.

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CHAPTER XI

THE BRITISH CONSUL AND HIS WIFE HAVE THE FIGHT OF
THEIR LIVES—HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT
SEES TWO AND THREE-QUARTER TONS OF FISH
LANDED

THE following week-end we were joined by the British Consul, William Ewing, and his wife, who, being greatly interested in the reports of the big fish we had been capturing, came over to Taboga to join us on one of our expeditions, hoping to take part in the capture of something really large ; so we all left early on the Saturday morning, buoyed with expectation.

Having anchored the yacht, and had the sand-shark lines run out, Lady Brown and I sat back to watch the fun. Very shortly the Consul's line began to go off. I carefully explained to him to let it run through his fingers without resistance.

" Now tighten, William, and haul hard ! " I shouted.

He did, and got the shock of his life. I had forgotten he was not wearing leather gloves, and the language used by this representative of his Majesty's Government could not have been called diplomatic ! The wild enthusiasm of excitement, however, caused by a big fish on the line cannot be damped by a skinned hand, and although he was suffering considerably, he hung on like grim death ; but it was impossible for him to stop the fish until it had run the full length of the line, when after it had struggled and fought for some time, he commenced to work it in towards the boat. None of us rendered him any aid, as I particularly wanted him to catch his first big one alone, so that afterwards he could truthfully say he had landed it without any

help, and this he did. After despatching it with a rifle and getting it on deck, we found it weighed round 310 pounds, and Ewing was hugely excited. I do not think he had every imagined he would catch such a fish in his life.

During all this time nothing had happened to Mrs. Ewing's line, so I pulled it in to examine the bait, which I found had entirely disappeared. I certainly had not seen any movement, and although she had been holding it in her hands, she said she had not felt the slightest sign of a bite, yet something had entirely removed the 6-pound Spanish mackerel which I had impaled on the hook. I baited it up afresh for her, and once more out it went, after which I proceeded to remove the jaws and vertebræ from her husband's fish, so that he could preserve them as trophies, and doubtless one day, when peacefully settled in England, after the manner of all true sportsmen he will tell wonderful stories to admiring friends of "how it was done!"

"I've got a bite!" suddenly called out Mrs. Ewing.

"Drop the line!" I shouted; "don't try and stop it!" for I did not want her to get her hands in the same condition as her husband's (I am always solicitous for ladies' welfare!).

The slack whizzed off the deck, never stopping until it jerked up short when the end was reached.

"Now see if you can haul on it," I said to her.

Mrs. Ewing is possessed of considerable muscular strength, and I think she expected to pull that fish in hand over hand, thereby gloating over her husband, but oh, what an awakening! She commenced to pull—harder and still harder, the perspiration trickling down her face. I really think she was getting annoyed as we all began to laugh. Her husband, as an expert, now commenced to give her sage advice, much to her indignation. I was becoming very curious, for the fish on the end of the line was certainly not behaving like a sand-shark.

"Let me feel it," I said to her; but it was not till

I bent down and got a grip on her line that I realised the tremendous strain that was being imposed on it.

"Ewing!" I called out, "if your wife lands this fish she'll have the laugh of you for ever, for the one you've just caught is a midget beside it. Heaven knows what she's hooked, but it's no sand-shark!"

I tried to move it, but it was useless. Lady Brown and Mr. and Mrs. Ewing now came to help me, and all four of us commenced to pull, but our efforts were quite unavailing.

"You'd better get the anchor up," I said to Robbie, "start the engine as quick as you can, and go slowly ahead, or the line's going to burst," and in a few seconds we glided slowly ahead, thus somewhat relieving the tension.

Meanwhile the fish was swimming steadily deep down.

"Ewing," I said, "if we land this fish, it'll not be the least use your telling people about your 300-pounder, because when your wife commences, and shows the photographs of this one, you'll not have a look in!"

"Ah, my boy," he answered, "I've found that out long ago!"

We shook hands with feeling—personally I was thinking of the episode of Lady Brown and myself on the pontoon, when I certainly didn't get the last word!

What a dogged fight that fish put up! In spite of our united efforts, it was at least an hour and a half before we gained sight of it. Mrs. Ewing was in a great state of excitement—I really forget what she was going to do to her husband if she lost that fish, and in view of the awful threats, he was outwardly equally fervent in his hopes that it would not escape, whatever his secret longings may have been, knowing that its capture would totally eclipse his.

With hard work it was eventually got alongside the yacht. It was really a magnificent sight. As it came to the surface they all looked over the side, and now the rifle was brought into play. The bullets evidently reached the heart, for there was one terrific convulsive

movement, a wave of water burst into the air, and then there was only a twitching of the tail.

On turning round I now observed a sorry sight. Mr. and Mrs. Ewing, who were not dressed in the same fishing attire as Lady Brown and I, were drenched, blood and water streaming down all over their clothes, which looked like a futurist nightmare. They had caught the full force of the wave thrown up by the fish's last spasm—but what did it matter? The battle had been won, and now we had but to tow our vanquished opponent ashore so that it might be immortalised by the camera.

Upon being beached, it proved to be a white shark, measuring nearly 14 feet in length, and weighing over 1,400 pounds, which speaks volumes for the strength of my lines, for it had been caught on those I used for the sand-sharks, never expecting anything this size to take the small bait.

I think we were really all too pleased with ourselves to attempt any more fishing, besides which there was my usual work to do. They were also very keen on seeing our little colony of land-crabs, so while they went off for this purpose, I removed the vertebræ and jaws.

I had planned to take them out next day after saw-fish, and upon our return in the evening I received news that his Excellency Dr. Belisario Porras would come over the following day with a party in the Presidential yacht, and hoped to see a real monster. Needless to say I was most anxious to gratify his wishes. I found the tide would be exactly right if we started at 8 a.m. I believe it is usually recognised that it is very difficult for ladies to rise early, but all I can say is that anticipation must be a wonderful thing, for at about 6.30 a.m. they had breakfasted, and were down, literally fussing to get away. The panga and four natives from the village were waiting, and without delay, hitching on to the back of the yacht, away we went, arriving at our destination well before time. During the interval which had to elapse before the



1½-TON SAWFISH (p. 224)
Length, 24½ ft ; girth, 17½ ft



GREAT WHITE SHARK (p 230)

tide was low enough for us to go out after saw-fish, we ran out our sand-shark lines again, but this time had no luck. I knew the President would arrive at Taboga round lunch time, and was therefore most desirous to tow back a really mighty specimen, so that he and his party could see what the waters of Panama Bay contained. The tide having dropped low enough, Mr. and Mrs. Ewing, with the four natives, now went off in the panga to search for saw-fish, while we remained on the yacht taking it easy. We had pulled the shark-lines in, being much too interested in watching what luck they had to fish ourselves.

"Look! they've spotted one," I said, and almost as I spoke down went the pole. We could see the line rushing out, to be followed by their little boat leaping forward as the full force of the frantic fish struck it. They were now travelling very fast, and heading straight for the yacht. As they came closer I shouted out asking if they were trying to ram us, but they were all too wildly excited to take any notice. When passing our stern Ewing called out :

"Come and help us !"

"Not a chance !" I replied. "Fight it out to the bitter end—if you're all thrown into the water, then we'll mercifully pick you up !"

Straight towards the mainland the big fish was towing them—on and on they travelled.

"They're into a big one," I said to Lady Brown ; "it's fighting very much harder than the one we got the other day."

They must have gone at least three miles before I could see through the glasses they were gradually gaining the mastery, and realised that they now needed assistance to tow the fish in to shore, so we ran out to them. Ewing was puffing and blowing, and he and his wife were wet through with perspiration.

"Oh, boy !" he called out, "this is the greatest sport in the world !"

"I agree," I replied ; "but don't forget you're having

exceptionally fine weather—you've not tried it when there's the devil of a storm blowing."

We got the fish to the surface and despatched it with the rifle, then fastened it and the panga astern and proceeded to tow them towards Taboguilla. This took fully an hour. Ewing was insatiable—the lust of battle had entered into him, and no sooner had he arrived back than he was in a fever of desire to go after another, so off they went again. I told him I did not think it was any use, as the tide was now running in strong, and I was afraid the water would be too deep, but he was determined to have another shot at them.

I was busily engaged in seeing the fish made fast to the stern capstan, when a hail from Lady Brown on deck told me they had had the luck to strike into another, and looking shoreward, we could see them being pulled through the water by another fish. This time they were not towed so far, and like my first one, it returned to what was evidently its home, and started sulking on the bottom, working close inshore, almost exactly the same as mine did, but after considerable trouble, it was finally beached. Having the rifle on the yacht, I had to row to them in the dinghy and kill this one, which finally joined its relative hitched to the stern of the boat.

"Good work, my boy—good work!" said Ewing.

"By Jove, I'm awfully glad," I replied; "this will be a sight for his Excellency to see."

Without delay we started up, and proceeded back to Taboga, towing the two big carcasses behind. I had no idea of their length or weight, having had no time to examine them properly. I knew they must be very heavy, because what with the weight of the dinghy, panga, and two fish we were towing, I do not think we were making more than $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 knots.

We had got about half-way home when we saw the Presidential yacht, covered in flags, and presenting a gala appearance, nearing Taboga, reaching there about forty minutes ahead of us. For some time before

our arrival, everybody in the place knew we had captured something big, owing to the slow pace at which we were travelling, and what with the arrival of the President and the anticipation of what we were bringing in, all the village assembled on the dock and vicinity, both Presidential party and natives being a-quiver with expectation. As we came ashore, the President and his guests, who had, while waiting for us, been having a swim, now came out of the water to welcome us.

"What have you got there, my dear friend?" asked his Excellency.

"We're going to show you something you've never seen before," I replied, and off he went (although only in his bathing costume) with Lady Brown and Mr. and Mrs. Ewing round to the little cove, followed by his guard, and the entire population of the village, while I superintended the landing of the big fish.

It took three pangas and our dinghy to tow them ashore, the enthusiasm of everybody during this period becoming still more intense, as it was the first time I had required the help of so many boats as this. When the fish grounded in the shallow water, the crowd seized the ropes, and with these numbers there was no need to wait—as I always had to do—for the tide to recede before the fish was fully exposed. They were pulled up, amidst acclamation, high and dry; and it was indeed a wonderful sight for those who had never seen anything like it before. First one, and then the other, were hauled on to the beach.

"Now, your Excellency, what do you think of them?" I asked.

He put both his arms round me, in the truly Spanish way, patting me on the back.

"My dear friend, my dear friend, this is marvellous—this is astounding! Never did I know such fish lived here. I can hardly believe it now. I must be photographed—yes, I must be photographed with them—I must be made immortal!"

Thereupon Lady Brown, together with the President,

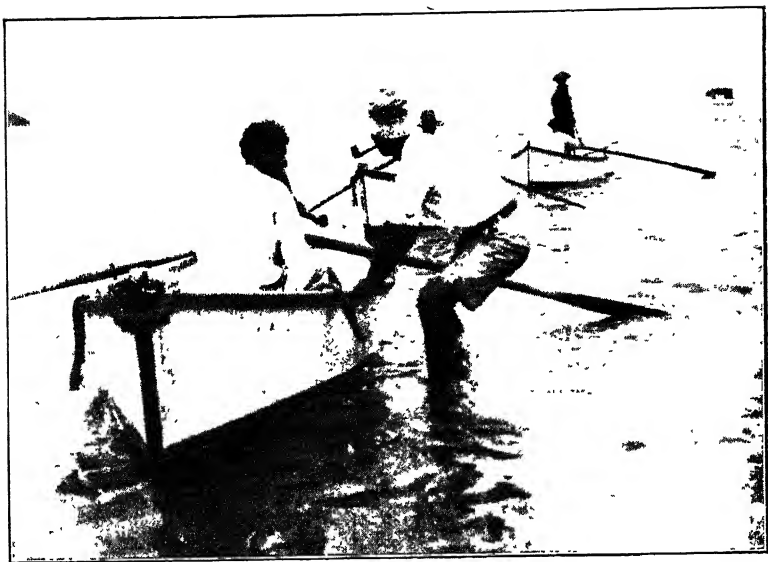
Mr. and Mrs. Ewing, and I faced the camera together with the big fish, but we had all entirely forgotten one thing—the President was still in his bathing costume, with his towel round his neck, the excitement of all being such that not only had he not noticed, but his staff had entirely forgotten to remind him of this fact, and I am sure none of us thought of doing so—which is the explanation of his somewhat unusual attire.

After photographs had been taken, all resumed their interrupted swim, and when I had finished measuring, weighing, and opening the fish, removing their saws, etc., we joined up in one party.

The President plied me with question after question in rapid succession—what did they weigh? what was their length? etc., etc.

They were not as big as I expected, the largest being almost identical with the one I had first caught, which weighed round $1\frac{3}{4}$ tons, while the second was much smaller, only weighing just over 1 ton.

Then came the lunch. It is really difficult in England, and Dry America, with champagne at the price it is, to convey a realisation of how on this occasion it flowed like water. Speech after speech was made, in which the President toasted our healths, expressing the greatest good-will towards us on behalf of the Panama Government, to which I replied. I could not help feeling at the time, as did we all, that it is incidents of this sort that do much good and unite nations together. No doubt there is a bond between sportsmen in which race, religion, and politics have no place. The real friendships which last are cemented in this way and I feel quite sure that the President will for many years remember that day at Taboga when he looks at the photographs which we later presented to him at the Palace . . . believe me, all attired very differently from when they were taken!



PANGAS TOWING FISH ASHORE (p. 233).



LADY BROWN, DR. BELISARIO PORRAS, PRESIDENT, THE AUTHOR, AND
MR. WILLIAM EWING, (BRITISH CONSUL, WITH BIG SAWFISH (p. 234).

CHAPTER XII

SIX THOUSAND FOUR HUNDRED AND NINETY POUNDS CAUGHT ON HOOK AND LINE IN A DAY

It was not long after this that we were joined by H. W. Huggins, an excellent example of that type of Englishman who, leaving the old country, seeks fresh fields and pastures new, doing splendid pioneer work, creating further trade and revenue, which are really the backbone of Great Britain's resources. He had recently been out to Providence and St. Andrew's Islands, in the Caribbean, collecting tortoiseshell, apart from which he had opened up quite a flourishing cocoa estate near Chorrera.

I shall always remember the morning he arrived. He impressed on me that he could only stay for two days, as he was obliged to return to England.

"We'll see!" I answered enigmatically.

I knew he was an ardent sportsman, and once having got the fever, that it would require wild horses to drag him away; but the first day we went out together proved very disappointing—something had gone wrong with our bait, which was decidedly odoriferous. Not a single fish did we hit, but we had demonstrated to us the definite fact, as far as sand-sharks are concerned, that they will not touch anything that has lost its pristine freshness.

We had fished all day, and in the afternoon, becoming disgusted, threw overboard the rest of the Spanish mackerel we had been using for bait. They were smelling pretty badly and we were thankful to see the last of them. They floated on the top of the water with an oily scum widening round. They had drifted

about ten yards from the boat when we both noticed one or two dorsal fins cutting through the water.

"Can you beat that?" I said to him. "Here we've been all day fishing with not a touch, and now look!"

The sharks came right up to the evil-smelling floating fish, knocked them, and poked them about with their noses, then swam round in circles, and returning nosed them again, but, very much like ourselves, they could not stand it, and without attempting to seize the bait, turned, and made off.

"You can't have a finer example of how silly the tales are that sharks like putrid fish," I said; "these fish were hungry, and wanted to feed, but you see they simply won't take anything that's putrid. Now you understand why we've not had a run all day?"

"Let's bathe!" he said.

"You can, if you like, but I refuse," I replied. "After being laid out for three weeks recently, the joys of tropical bathing don't appeal to me. If you want a dip, I'll keep 'cave' with the rifle, and protect your sacred person."

He was far too careful to attempt to swim out in deep water, but kept close inshore, while I watched ever on the alert. When he had finished, I said:

"Now I'll show you where I'm going to bathe."

In between some rocks was a deep pool, just a little larger than an ordinary-sized bath, and about 4 or 5 feet deep. On the tide rising every day the water flowed in, so that it was always fresh.

"How about this for an ideal tub?" I asked him. "No fear of sharks or sting-rays, and the water is so hot you could sit in here for hours if you wanted without getting chilled."

Happy in the knowledge that if not very godly, we were at least cleanly, we returned home, where I am quite sure our tales of the huge fish we had lost excited grave suspicion in the mind of Lady Brown, who had decided to remain behind and rest that day.

"I knew you wouldn't catch anything as I wasn't with you," she said.

It is a curious fact that nearly every native in the place believed that unless she was in the boat there would be no fish, and it nearly always worked out this way. They became quite superstitious on the subject, almost seeming to dislike going out without her.

"I'll go to-morrow," she told us, "and you'll catch something then."

The next day we sallied forth, full of fresh hope. In view of what followed, I should like to point out that our bait on this occasion was quite fresh—totally different from that of the day before. We arrived off Taboguilla about 8 o'clock, and at once commenced to fish with the sand-shark lines. By Jove! they were there, and waiting for us! I had only run out two lines, and not three minutes had elapsed before we were hard at it from both sides of the boat, and fast into good fish. We got them alongside successfully, and alternately holding their heads up, Robbie clubbed them vigorously, and we heaved them on deck. They must have weighed nearly 300 pounds apiece.

"Let's see if we can't make a record catch!" said Huggins. "I propose we go on fishing like this, and see how many we can get before our strength gives out."

This was the beginning of one of the most remarkable day's fishing I have ever had in my life. Every time the lines were run out off went a fish. Having landed eight, we were both pretty well all in, as indeed were Robbie and our other boy. Drenched through with perspiration, gasping and puffing—the only thing we felt would make life perfect was water, and plenty of it.

We ran out the lines again—it was Lady Brown's turn to do some hard work while we rested.

"Watch her," I said to Huggins. "Bet you a dollar if she hooks a fish she'll lose it!"

The look I received from her expressed her contempt better than words, and almost at that moment away went the line. I thought she was going to let the fish

strike itself when the end of the line was reached, but letting it run without resistance through her hands, all of a sudden I saw her tighten and haul back hard. We both shuddered as we saw she had struck a heavy fish, and knew as the line was torn through her hands that it must have ripped the skin off.

"Let go!" I shouted—"for God's sake let go!"

She would not—her blood was up. Now commenced a most remarkable fight—she was determined to catch that fish herself, and although we almost implored her to let us help, she positively refused. She was hauling and playing the shark with what seemed almost super-human strength, though I could see from the expression on her face she was suffering agony.

"For God's sake let go!" I cried again, "and let us handle it"; but it was impossible to get the line from her without tearing it out of her hands, and she was obdurate.

After about a quarter of an hour we could see she was feeling the strain badly, but she stuck it out and a little later brought the fish alongside. I would take no chances of missing it with the club, and rapidly smashed two bullets into it; but instead of immediately killing it, it tore off again with a tremendous dash, the line once more tearing through her hands. However, it was the last effort, and it was quickly brought up to the boat—this time quite dead.

We hauled it on deck, and found it weighed 415 pounds, which is, I believe, a world's record for a fish landed by a woman on a line. Considerable space was devoted in the Canadian and American papers to the photographs and story of this capture, and it was really a feat of which anyone might have felt proud, but what a price she paid! Her hands were in a terrible condition, the skin being ripped off all the fingers, and also from the palm of one hand, and for nearly three weeks they had to be bandaged, which stopped her active participation in fishing during this time.

We wanted to return to Taboga, but she would not

hear of it, telling us that we had started so well towards a record catch that she would not dream of spoiling our sport, so again we commenced.

Very shortly we were hard at it—sand-shark after sand-shark we caught, though none as large as Lady Brown's—their average weight was between 250 and 280 apiece. Resting every now and then, we ultimately landed sixteen, the deck being piled high with them.

I had not yet run my line out after catching my last fish.

"Let's chuck it, Huggins," I said; "I'm absolutely tired out."

"One more strike," he begged, "and we'll quit."

"Right-o," I replied; "I'll watch what you do."

Almost at once his slack commenced to leave the deck, but as he struck, this fish made a wild dash that almost shot him overboard. The line was torn from his hands and fairly whistled out, coming up with a tremendous jerk when the end was reached.

"That's no sand-shark!" he cried.

We both felt the line—it was straining as if it would burst any minute.

"Up with the anchor, Robbie—quick—start the engine!" and we went ahead.

"Now I wonder what it is this time?" said Huggins.

"Heaven alone knows," I replied; and while we were both feeling the line, waiting for a favourable opportunity for the fish to ease up, I told him of our adventure with the big fish that had towed us out and bitten through the steel shank of our hook.

"We've got to play this fish very gently," I said; "remember this is only one of the light lines. Take your time and go easy, and we may land it."

I went to the wheel, manipulating the boat in the direction of the fish, accelerating our speed in tune to its rushes, while he, Robbie, and the boy handled the line. A long time elapsed, and still it seemed that we

graphs of this huge catch, including the tiger-shark, the curious markings of which can be clearly seen.

Our total bag was sixteen sand-sharks and one tiger-shark, the latter 14 feet 2 inches in length, and weighing 1,370 pounds. The total weight of the whole seventeen was 6,490 pounds, and the *New York World* and *New York Times*, together with other newspapers, I believe, considered this a world's record capture in one day on the line.¹ As a result of the publicity, I had many letters from various parts of the States, England, and Canada enquiring about the fishing off Panama. It may become a second Florida—who knows?

To open up all these fish in the small time remaining that day was out of the question—I examined as many as possible, but had perforce to leave the majority untouched.

In spite of the fact that we were worn out, we summoned up enough energy to tow all these carcasses out to sea, dumping them in our usual fishing-ground, in the hope that they would attract swarms of other fish before we commenced operations next day, when we made up our minds we would not use the sand-shark lines at all, but start right away with our heaviest tackle. For this purpose we retained eight huge slabs of shark flesh for bait.

It was quite dark by the time we returned to Taboga. I think Lady Brown's fame as a mascot was now firmly established for ever. Down in the village in all seriousness they ascribed to her presence this great catch, though to this day I am sure they have never understood what the "fool English" should want, to go out fishing for something that could not be eaten or sold.

¹ The photograph is on the page facing 260.

CHAPTER XIII

FIGHT WITH TWO GREAT SHARKS—AN AWFUL SIGHT

WE were frightfully stiff on the morrow, and Lady Brown's hands were very painful, but in spite of that she determined to accompany us again. Before dropping anchor I circled the yacht over the place where we had deposited the shark carcasses, but not a vestige of them remained. Huggins thought the fish, having had such a gorge, would probably not feed, but a big shark's appetite is something enormous—like the pelican, it never seems satisfied.

We ran out two heavy shark-lines with a huge bait, weighing nearly 60 pounds on each—then sat down to await events, and were shortly rewarded. My line was the first to start running out. I did not attempt to strike, letting it run to the end before touching it.

"Now then, come on, all together!" I shouted. "Let's see what we can do with it!"

We hauled and struggled against the big bulk fighting a hundred yards away, but our efforts for some time were quite unavailing, when by dint of sheer brute strength we commenced foot by foot to haul in. So hard at work were we that we had not thought about the other line out, until Robbie, glancing round, yelled that there was another fish on this. This was the first time I had seen two giants on together. We were all pulling as hard as we could, none of us being able to leave the one for a moment to attend to the other, which commenced to circle round the bow of the boat. Evidently it must have crossed ours, for suddenly the line was torn from our grasp, running out once more to its full length, and we could all see that the two big fish

had come together and were fast entwining the ropes. Every now and again it was quite easy to see they were tugging in different directions, actually pulling against one another.

"Huggins, there's nothing to do now but smoke," I said; "we've as much chance of landing these two fish before they become played out as a snowflake has of not melting in——" Seeing Lady Brown I ended abruptly.

"Saved!" I breathed.

"Coward!" replied Huggins, *sotto voce*.

"Hero!" I retorted, "you finish it." But there was nothing doing.

Some little time went by and we were getting tired of sitting there doing nothing, when Huggins had an inspiration.

"I know! Let's up anchor, start the engine and go astern, towing them after us: we may be able to drown them that way."

"Right-o!" I answered, but as soon as we commenced to move, there was certainly some trouble from those fish—they fought and tugged while slowly we crept nearer the shore. When we had arrived so close that I did not dare approach further, I said:

"I still don't see that we are any nearer solving the difficulty than we were before; how are we going to beach them?"

Here the genius in the man rose uppermost.

"Why not bring the dinghy up to the bow, undo first one line, and then the other, and fasten them to the dinghy, and then row them in?"

Robbie was smiling broadly. I whispered in his ear:

"Don't say anything—let him try it, but I'll stand by."

His plan was carried out to the letter: with great difficulty first one line and then the other was attached to the bow of the little boat, but the oars had hardly been dipped in the water before what I knew would happen took place. Instead of making the shore they

started going out to sea, for they had just as much chance of towing in those two fish as they had of moving the island itself.

Huggins was straining at the oars whilst I sat on the deck cheering him on to fresh efforts. He could not retort suitably, because Lady Brown was on deck, doubled up with laughter, but what he was saying in an undertone to Robbie, who was with him, I could guess, as I have always been an adept at putting myself in another person's place !

After watching their futile struggles for a little while, my soft-hearted companion suggested I had better go to their rescue.

"The only thing that makes me do it is that I'm afraid of losing our little boat," I replied, so away we went after them, but although to get the lines from the deck fastened on the dinghy was one matter, to get them back again was another, and I at once saw this was quite impossible. There was only one thing to do, and that was to tow the lot as it was. I threw a rope to them, and again reversing the engine, brought them back as close as I dared to the shore.

We were still no nearer a solution of how to land the fish.

"It's no good, Huggins," I shouted out ; "I'll have to go astern, and keep on going until they're drowned."

"I don't care what you do," was his irate reply, so I proceeded to carry this into effect ; and after some time had elapsed, the fish appeared to be pretty well dead, thereupon I dropped anchor about 30 yards off the beach, and throwing them the heavy rope, told them to make it fast to the two fish-lines, then quickly row with it ashore, fasten it round the rocks, and return to the yacht for myself and the boy. They were able to carry this out all right, and presently, by all of us hauling, we gradually worked the two sharks into shallow water.

"Now fasten the line up tight," I said, "and leave

them while we go back to the yacht, do some fishing, and eat. The tide will drop presently, and we can examine them."

I had plenty of spare tackle with me, so being without the two lines that were hooked into the tied-up fish made no difference, and after lunch we commenced fishing again. Although we tried for some time, we seemed to have no luck, and were about to cease when off went Huggins's line. This time I pulled in mine at once. I was determined to have no more mix-ups, but when his manilla rope had run to the end, I knew this was something very different, for the force and strength were sufficient to move the yacht easily. Ahead it went—we at once pulled up the anchor, and now we were off, towed by a veritable giant. There was no fear of the tackle parting now the boat was under way, and this time I felt assured we should really land a monster. Huggins had never seen anything quite like this before, and for some time was, I think, almost too surprised to speak. Straight towards the mainland the big fish swam, farther and farther away from Taboguilla.

"If it keeps on like this for an hour or two," I groaned, "we'll land up in Panama"; but it soon changed its course, heading towards Taboga, then bore away towards Urava.

"How long do you think it's going on?" enquired Huggins.

"Silly question number one," I replied. "How on earth do I know? I've not got the faintest idea what we've got on."

We all tried hauling on the rope, but it was useless.

"Suppose we reverse it again?"

"No use," I answered; "this is far too big for that—even this tackle wouldn't stand that strain. There's only one thing to do—let it keep on going till it tires itself out."

Two hours and a half went by in this manner before we were able to start regaining line by using our utmost

strength. The fish had now ceased to tow us, and seemed to be almost a dead weight. Foot by foot, slowly but surely we were pulling it in closer. I was expecting a wild dash every moment, but nothing happened. Presently the line was stretched straight down beneath us, and whatever was on the other end commenced to come towards the surface.

"Oh, my God!" suddenly called out Huggins, "look down, and for heaven's sake don't bring it any nearer the yacht!"

I looked beneath the water, and saw an awful sight—a huge shape which seemed to be almost the size of the boat appeared with, out from the front of the head, a grotesque projection serrated each side with the curious pointed sharp teeth of the saw-fish.

"We must get this one, Huggins," I said; "it's a long way bigger than anything I've yet landed—this fish must weigh over 2 tons if it weighs a pound. Come on! let's do the best we can."

Inch by inch, higher and higher we raised it. Now the wicked-looking eyes in the top of its flat head were plainly visible, the huge broad flappers on either side moved feebly in the water. As it rose to the surface I saw at once by its colossal bulk that it was a female, but I had much to learn of the habits of these fish.

"Give the rope a half hitch round this stanchion," I called out, "and hold it there while I get the rifle."

I was just on the point of firing when the motionless form was seized with a maniacal fury—I had just time to notice the huge saw flash round when the thud and shock as it struck the boat jarred all of us. At the same moment a perfect wave of water came completely over the yacht, blinding us for the instant, and when we again looked over the side, our mortification was intense to discover the fish had disappeared, the hook having been wrenched completely out of the mouth with the tremendous force to which it had been subjected.

We were too surprised to say anything. Then Huggins looked at me sadly and said :

" I'll dream of that fish all my life, and I'm quite sure no one will ever believe me when I tell the story. How long do you think it was ? "

" Without any exaggeration it must have been at least 28 feet."

" Yes, it was quite that," he answered.

Suddenly I remembered something :

" Robbie, go below, and see if we are taking in water — it wouldn't surprise me if that terrific blow with the saw hasn't pierced the bottom of the boat."

Robbie quickly returned with the welcome news that all was well ; but subsequently when I beached the *Cara* to have the bottom cleaned, I found that there were four holes driven completely through the copper plates on the bottom.

Later I was to witness the strength of this fish's weapon.

" Never mind, Huggins," I said to him, " it's all part of the game."

" Yes," he groaned, " but what a picture lost ! Can't you see a photograph of that fish enlarged hanging on the wall ? I'll never cease to regret not landing it."

" We'll try again to-morrow," I said, " and see if we can't get another."

He shook his head sadly.

" Never ! "

We now returned, and went ashore to examine the two fish we had previously stranded in the shallow water, which the receding tide had meanwhile left high and dry. As we stood looking at them I said :

" Well, my boy, here at any rate is a picture for you — what do you think of that for a day's work ? "

They were both shovel-nose, and there appeared to be little difference in weight between them. One weighed round 1,050 pounds, the other about 1,100, while they both measured over 13 feet. It was getting so late that to photograph and open them that day was

or two " had by now developed into ten—as I had shrewdly suspected would be the case !

We caught quite a few more fish together, but at last he tore himself away. We were awfully sorry when he left, and my hope is that our fishing may be continued in the near future.

CHAPTER XIV

WE ARE CAUGHT IN AN AWFUL STORM

Two or three days after Huggins's departure, we ran out to Melones in the yacht, to try off the little sandy bay there. It was a glorious morning, with the sea as smooth as a mill-pond, but intensely hot—the atmosphere seemed almost to press one down. We had good sport in the morning, and after catching sand-sharks for bait, played and landed a big shovel-nose which was certainly over 12 feet in length. We tied it to our stern to tow back later, after we had finished our day's work. The heat became insufferable as the day advanced—in fact, so bad that I at last suggested we should not bother any more, but lunch in the cock-pit and return. Little did we guess while we were eating what was coming!

We had almost finished our meal when I happened to look out in the direction of Panama, to find the whole of the mainland with the islands of Tortola and Flamenco utterly obscured—sky and sea had merged in one, and a deep gloom was settling over everything. Even as I looked, the darkness advanced with great rapidity, yet not a breath of wind rippled the water where we lay.

"Start the engine, Robbie!" I shouted, "and up with the anchor! We've got to make for Taboga as quick as we can—we're right in the path of a great storm."

I turned to Lady Brown.

"I don't like the look of things; there's a chuquesana coming hard down upon us."

The engine started, and now for the first time the

anchor jammed in some unsuspected rocks—strain as hard as we could, it was impossible to shift it.

“There’s only one thing to do,” I said: “I’ll go ahead and tear it up.”

As I started to do this, the first puff of wind struck us, to be followed almost instantaneously by the full blast of the hurricane. With a wrench I felt the anchor give; but now the fury of the gale was so great that we were hurled back before it, and to complete our misfortune, at that moment the engine faltered and stopped. We were at once swept past the little bay—closer and closer to the rocks which jutted out on either side of the island. Robbie down below was frantically endeavouring to get the engine started. All at once I remembered the shark tied on to our stern, and here, I knew, was the cause of our trouble. Hanging on for dear life, I made my way to the end of the boat, and looking over, saw that the rope with which it was tied up had become wound round the propeller. I hacked at it desperately with my knife, cutting it free—but too late! With a sudden grinding crash we struck.

“Jump for your life!” I shouted to Lady Brown.

The sea had become very rough, breaking over us continuously. A receding wave carried us off into deep water, and now I could hear the engine at last chugging, but made sure we were lost, for with another horrible bump, we were thrown up on the rocks. It seemed impossible the boat could live. Once more we dropped off into deep water, almost broadside; struggling manfully, we drew away a few feet—still a little further—how I prayed the engine would not fail us!

It is almost impossible to describe what occurred after this, for, with a frightful noise, we seemed to be in the midst of a water-spout, an unbroken torrent thundering down on deck. In the middle of this raging hell I thought I must be suffering from hallucinations, for a heavy coil of rope and other articles were lifted from the deck into the air and, whirling upwards, disappeared.

The gloom was now so intense that from the wheel I

could not see the bow of the boat, while the smashing of the rain was nearly blinding me. There was nothing to do but drive before the wind. I was suffering acutely from my eyes, when I felt a hand held against my forehead, shielding them. I looked round in amazement to see that instead of jumping, as I had begged her to do, Lady Brown had stuck to the ship.

"Why didn't you jump?" I fairly gasped, "we'll never weather this!"

I don't know what she said—in fact, for the next hour or so I seemed to live in a maze. I had not the slightest idea where we were being driven—whether we were making water, or what was happening to us. How I thanked God when there came a lull! Momentarily it became lighter, and to my amazement I found we had circled the island completely, and were once more off the sandy bay where the blast had first struck us. This breathing-space, however, was merely temporary. The darkness again closed in, growing even denser. We were at the mercy of the elements. The following waves were now so high they were breaking over our stern and even into the cock-pit. The storm raged fully an hour before the wind commenced to abate, but the rain was still terrific. I endeavoured to steer in the direction in which I imagined Taboga to be.

"I believe I'm going right!" I yelled.

They agreed with me.

"If only this curtain would lift!" I groaned.

The rain lessened, but a heavy sea was running. The black mass rolled over, and now we could see where we were. I was horrified to find that instead of heading towards Taboga, I was actually making straight out in the Pacific, having been driven at least 14 miles in the opposite direction.

I don't think any of us will ever forget the journey back. How we escaped death is an inexplicable miracle, and even when we did arrive it was to find the sea rolling in so heavily that to drop anchor in our usual place was an utter impossibility, so we ran round Morro

Island, and tucked ourselves in behind. As soon as the anchor had dropped, a reaction set in after the tension we had passed through, and we lay out almost prostrate during the three hours which elapsed before we could creep into our old mooring. The people at the hotel had meantime been seriously alarmed, and I do not think they ever expected to see us again. They had received warning from the mainland that a hurricane was coming, but of course they were quite unable to let us know.

However, there was more trouble to follow. At day-break next morning I was hurriedly aroused by a very agitated Robbie.

"The boat's leaking badly, Boss, and I'm afraid she'll sink."

Only waiting to get my shirt and shorts on, I dashed down with him, and went on board, to find the little yacht was indeed in a serious condition. Water was coming in from somewhere, and had risen up to the engine. We both started to pump as hard as we could to get the water down, so that we could start the engine. Fortunately we were successful, and without waiting for breakfast, made straight off for Balboa. By the time we had reached there, she was leaking worse than ever. We docked close to the Government shops, and without delay men came on board to try to save her from sinking. They found the lavatory pipe had fractured—this was quickly stopped temporarily with a wooden plug; but as she was still making water, there were evidently other places. Systematically overhauling her, they discovered the sea coming in through the tail-shaft bearing; the exhaust pipe was also badly cracked, propeller damaged, and copper plates torn away from the bottom, and all this was caused when the storm had flung her on the rocks at Melones.

I made arrangements for the repairs to be carried out. They were good chaps, and when they heard how we had been caught in the terrible storm the day

before, they were surprised our little craft had weathered it ; but that night, when I returned to Taboga, I was indeed the bearer of bad news. Still, considering everything, I was thankful the damage was not even worse, and we were alive, which was more than I had at one time expected.

During the ten days that elapsed before our yacht was ready for sea, we spent our time in thoroughly examining Taboga Island, and in collecting coral and innumerable beautiful shells round the beach, but time hung heavily on our hands. This enforced idleness did not suit us at all, and it was really a great day when I returned to Balboa to fetch our little boat. I brought her in with all flags flying, and I could not help feeling that everyone was as glad to see her again as we were ourselves. She certainly looked spick and span, for during the time she had been laid up Robbie had re-varnished and painted her afresh, so she was looking her best, and we solemnly split a bottle of champagne to celebrate the occasion.

There was one thing we made up our minds about—and that was never to return to Melones, for it was here Lady Brown had nearly been killed by the shark, and the second time we had narrowly escaped destruction by the chuquesana, and remembering the old adage that the "third's the charm," we were not quite certain where the charm might lie, so determined to take no chances.

On our first trip we ran out to Chamé. Whilst anchoring in the sandy mouth of the river, having nothing better to do, I thought I would try with a light rod. There must be swarms of cat-fish here, for as fast as the bait was dropped in I caught them. They are ugly-looking things, averaging about a pound in weight, and the greatest care has to be exercised in removing the hook, owing to three very sharp spines, one rising from the dorsal, and the other two from the pectoral fins. This is a good place for corbina—I got three or four, weighing five or six pounds each, finishing up

with a little shark that could not have weighed more than eight or nine.

The weather remained perfect all day, and we were glad to find the yacht in as good trim as ever, so determined to recommence our hunt of great game without delay.

CHAPTER XV

BATTLE WITH A GREAT SAW-FISH—TERRIFIC FIGHT BETWEEN SHARK AND SAW-FISH

I WAS still keen on getting a really big saw-fish, the largest I had actually landed up to date weighing $1\frac{3}{4}$ tons ; so, making full preparations, started off next morning with the panga and natives. There was no need to leave early, as the tide would not be right until about 11 o'clock, and timing it to a nicety, after anchoring, we were soon drifting in the panga over their ground.

The Panaman harpoon expert had given me many hints how to use this weapon, and placing myself in the bow, I was all in readiness to strike, should I be lucky enough to see one of the great shapes lying motionless on the bottom. I was just telling the oarsman to work a little closer, when right ahead beneath the surface I perceived a dark outline. I could not really make out exactly whether it was a fish or not, but on the offchance drove down the harpoon as hard as I could. Ye gods ! I was not left long in doubt. Whizz went the rope over the bow of the panga, and back I was hurled into the bottom. As the end of the line was reached we shot forward, the water curling from our bow, for we were cutting through at a great pace.

" We're into a real one this time," I said to them when I had somewhat recovered myself.

The only thing to do now was to have the oars in readiness to turn the boat as rapidly as possible in case the fish doubled—to back water was impossible, so strongly and rapidly was the fish swimming: had we done so, the blades would probably have snapped. There

was no doubt we were all in considerable danger. Away out across the bay the big fish travelled with undiminished speed, and I knew that if everything went in our favour we were in for a long, stern battle. Much, however, depended on whether I had driven the harpoon into a more or less vital spot.

At least an hour and a half must have elapsed when, totally unlike the others we had captured, it appeared to be coming towards the surface. Up came the big saw, to be followed by the tremendous shape. It had quite stopped going ahead. Now the oars were got out, for there was more than a possibility of trouble coming and our safest place was as far away as the end of the line would allow.

In a fury of rage it commenced to thrash the water both with its tail and flukes, and immediately afterwards I witnessed exactly how the saw was used. With immense force it struck alternately to right and left with a rapid slashing motion, when, turning slightly sideways, it drove up and down in the same manner; then, curving the tail and saw towards each other, so that the body was shaped like a bow, it snapped straight out with tremendous force. Had our boat been within striking distance, one blow from the tail or saw would have spelt disaster. I had my rifle with me and, taking snapshot aim, fired twice. The suck of the bullet as it found its mark, followed by the frightful ingurgitation, was eloquent testimony that I had not missed.

Down the big fish drove, but the water in Panama Bay is not particularly deep anywhere, so we had no fear of the end of the line being reached. It remained beneath for only a few minutes, when it again came to the surface, bursting the water in every direction. Again I fired, and struck a vital spot. After this last shot its movements became perceptibly feebler, while the tell-tale ever-widening circle of red showed blood must be pouring from the holes caused by the bullets.

We now started to pull towards the shore, the fish

making no further resistance. All this time I had been wondering why the yacht had not come to our aid—I fear I anathematised everyone on board. How I wished the *Cara* would come and lend a hand! After struggling valiantly for some time, we ultimately had to give in—we found the towing of this big carcase was quite beyond our strength.

Standing up in the panga, we waved the oars backwards and forwards, signalling to the yacht, which was about two miles distant, that we were in need of her. Every now and then I could see what I took to be Lady Brown waving back, but still the yacht did not come. I now realised there must be something wrong. We sat out there in the sizzling heat, fuming, for over an hour before I saw the *Cara* commence to move towards us: whatever had been the matter was evidently rectified. She was coming full speed, with Lady Brown at the wheel.

In answer to enquiries as they came up alongside I was told that a wretched little spring that governed the petrol feed had broken, and it had taken much coaxing before another could be replaced to regulate the proper mixture. It would have been a serious matter for us if our boat had been overturned by the fish and we had been flung into the sea, while a stupid little matter like this kept the yacht from coming to our assistance.

It did not take long to get the panga and our rope attached to the stern of the *Cara*, when very slowly (in case we tore the harpoon out) we commenced to return to the island. The tide was almost full, and choosing a nice sandy spot, with the utmost care I nosed the yacht on the beach—then unfastening the panga from the stern, while two jumped into the sea almost up to their necks and pulled it, the other tugged at the oars and quickly got to shore, while the engines of the *Cara* were reversed, and she backed out, anchoring about 50 yards away. Lady Brown, Robbie, and the boy then also joined us, rowing from the yacht in the dinghy.

We now all heaved on the line, slowly hauling the fish in. Ultimately it grounded in the shallow water, and we could do nothing more than leave it until the falling tide should accomplish the rest.

Two or three returned to the yacht, bringing food, the kettle, etc., ashore, where we built a fire and fed, for we had plenty of time to spare before we could examine the fish.

Time seems to hang very heavily when you are all impatience to be up and doing, but the now rapidly dropping tide presently commenced to disclose a monstrous bulk, and soon high and dry the great shape lay, when we were able to examine what, up till now, was the mightiest fish I had ever caught. It was a giant saw-fish, 29 feet in length by 19 feet in circumference, and weighed 4,500 pounds. The photograph shows the flat-bottomed panga used in its capture, and behind can be seen the rocky point of Taboguilla, while like a speck in the distance is the little yacht at anchor.

This remarkable photograph, taken by Lady Richmond Brown, shows plainly how these big fish are beached and left by the receding tide.

On examination it proved to be a male. My years of observation of sea-life told me that invariably the female was considerably larger than the male. I have noticed this with nearly all fish, not only in tropical water, but also off the shores of many other countries.

On careful examination the interior of this fish showed no trace of disease, but seemed singularly free from the various growths and complaints that attack the shark family.

I think the reports of the capture of this fish appeared in the press virtually all over the world, the *Daily Mail* in England, the *New York Times*, and *Toronto Star* devoting considerable space to the matter, which I believe aroused quite an amount of interest among the angling fraternity.

I was greatly bucked at getting this big fellow—I felt my long-cherished theories that monsters existed in the deep of which Science knew nothing were at last definitely materialising. My hammer-head shark with the grotesque head, the tiger-shark, the shovel-nose, and now this last, collectively proved that almost anything was possible.

Later that night, after our return, I was all anxiety to start out again with my big tackle, and was up next day at daybreak. At 7.30 being joined by Lady Brown, off we went.

I had saved a huge chunk of saw-fish flesh, and without delay, impaling a couple of baits (which must have weighed a hundred pounds apiece on my 14-pound hooks), I was about to lower them into the dinghy to be rowed out, when, looking ahead, my attention was attracted by the large dorsal fin of a 14-foot shark slowly moving through the water. Almost at the same time a huge black shape rose to the surface. Neither appeared to take the slightest notice of the other, the shark continuing on its way, but as it was swimming at a distance of about twenty yards past the motionless bulk, in a flash it suddenly shot in at right angles towards the great saw-fish—for such it was—and before the saw-fish could save itself, tore a great chunk out of its side.

The attacker turned to escape, but too late—the terrible weapon of the wounded leviathan smashed round. From where we were we could distinctly hear the thud as it struck the shark, almost severing it. Again the blow was repeated, the second being even more violent than the first. The shark must have been killed instantaneously.

It was a wonderful sight.

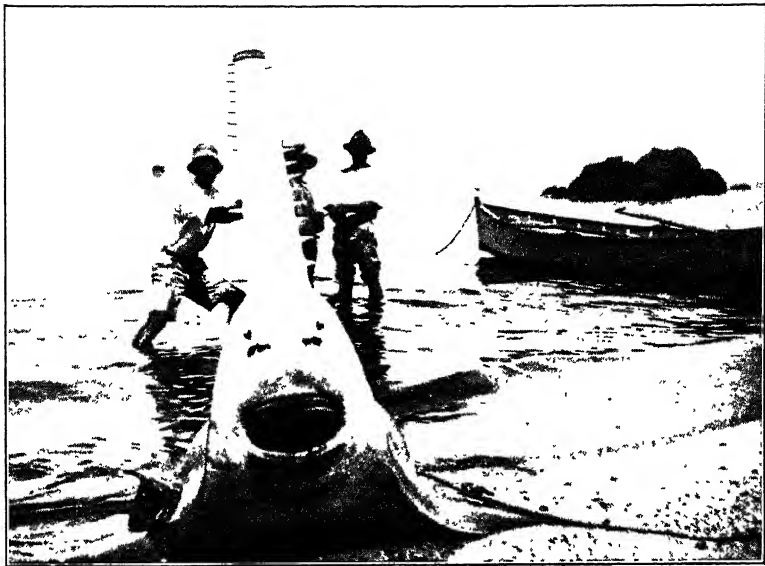
“By Jove!” I said. “A marine battle such as we have just seen must have frequently occurred in the Mesozoic Period.” Lady Brown shuddered, and replied: “How ghastly cruel nature is! It’s awful.”



SIXTEEN SAND SHARKS AND TIGER-SHARK CAUGHT ON HOOK AND LINE (p. 241).
Weight, 6,490 lb.



SCENERY UP THE BAYANO RIVER (p. 280).



MALE SAWFISH (p 259).
Length, 29 ft.; girth, 19 ft.; weight, 4,500 lb



TIGER-SHARK, 20 FT. 9 IN. (p. 265).

It was almost a certainty that the blood and carcase would attract fish, so I now had my two baits rowed out, having a conviction that we were going to catch another great fish.

"I'm going to get one to-day, as sure as I sit here," I said to Lady Brown.

CHAPTER XVI

FIGHT WITH A GREAT TIGER-SHARK—WE EXPLORE THE BAYANO RIVER

THE starboard line had not been in the water more than half an hour before the slack commenced to leave the deck, but strangely enough, after about 15 yards had disappeared, it stopped. I pulled in, to find the bait intact, with none of the usual tell-tale marks of shark's teeth. It was at once put out again, shortly after to perform the same trick.

"That's funny," I remarked. "I wonder what it can be?"

I rebaited, but it was quite an hour before anything happened. This time there was no hesitation. The end of the line was reached, but the hook evidently had not struck home, for the line at once dropped slack, and on hauling it in I found the bait had disappeared. I thought I had brought enough of the saw-fish meat with me to last all day, but found that after using such enormous slabs as I had been I had only one more big chunk left.

"Good luck!" I said, as it sank to the bottom, but it seemed as if the fish were not feeding, or else they were not there, for by lunch time we still recorded a blank—yet we both had an indefinable feeling that something was going to happen.

We had just finished eating when the line on the port side commenced to move off—at first almost by inches—so slowly that on picking it up I could detect a movement as if a fish was swallowing.

"I believe something's gulping the bait," I said;
"I can feel it on the line."

This, while I was speaking, had ceased to move altogether, but now again started to run out—slowly at first, then faster and faster as more of the slack left the deck. I had, of course, to let go of it entirely. By the heavy pull and stretching when it came up with almost a twang on the capstan, I knew we had struck an abnormal one. Although the yacht went ahead, tearing up the anchor, the iron in dragging managed to set itself again in the bottom ; and in spite of the strain on the line being terrific, I did not tell Robbie to heave up so that we might be towed, as that always meant a long and troublesome business.

There was no dash to and fro or circling, but simply a persistent pull straight ahead of the yacht. The motion of the fish beneath the water was most curious, for holding the tight line one could distinctly feel a twisting and twirling almost the same as when one hooks a big conger.

Lady Brown was all the time asking what I thought I had, but I was so preoccupied that she told me afterwards all I did was to grunt.

Presently the fish changed its tactics and, swimming deep down close to the boat, went astern. We all ran to the end, using our utmost strength to keep the rope from going round the propeller as the fish circled—but all in vain, and I was horrified when the line fouled it, for I knew that unless we could get it clear the strength of the fish was such it would bend, or seriously damage, its blades and might even tear it from the shaft. Fortunately there were no great rushes—had there been, it would certainly have spelt disaster ; but presently the fish swimming back, as the line momentarily slackened up we were able to free it with the iron hook on our pole.

"Thank the Lord for that!" said I, breathing a sigh of relief.

Very shortly, however, it again had us on tenter-hooks, for round the stern once more it went, with the result that the manilla rope was forced so tightly against the

port rail that I thought every minute it would tear the lot away.

"This comes of not pulling up the anchor," I said.
"Never again!"

Of course every time this happened we were exerting our utmost strength against the mighty bulk, and no doubt this saved serious damage, though our rail, having become badly bent, had afterwards to be taken down and straightened.

By almost superhuman heaving and pulling we managed to get the fish to return once more off the bow. I was quite mystified by the way it was fighting. In my struggles to save our rail and propeller I had barked my knuckles, which were beastly painful and were bleeding freely, but I still obstinately refused to have the anchor up when Robbie suggested it.

The doggedness of this brute was really extraordinary. With us struggling all the time, over two hours went by, and still the fish continued the same dead heavy pulling. It had now passed in front to the starboard side of the bow, moving the yacht with it, so that our nose was pointing straight towards the shore. This did not worry me in the least: so long as it kept up forward, and did not damage the propeller, we were happy.

It was now past 3 o'clock, and nearly low water, so there was no hope of beaching the fish that day, even if we finally managed to kill it, and it was three hours before we obtained a sight of it. Slowly it was becoming exhausted.

"It's a huge tiger-shark," I cried out.

As we obtained a plainer view, it could be seen that in its almost eel-like movements it had wrapped itself round and round with the line, which had hitched in the narrow base of the tail, and we were hauling it in slowly but surely tail first. As it came alongside the yacht, the cavernous mouth opened to its full width, then snapped with a force that would have severed a man with the greatest ease. Like the smaller one previously caught, the big black eyes every now and

then were covered with the curious protecting discs—it looked like the embodiment of vindictive hate. I do not know why, but one could almost sense its remorseless voraciousness. What a brute!

This, however, was by no means the end of the battle. More than six times the fish got alongside, only to lunge downwards again, its sheer bulk preventing us from arresting the movement. The rifle was all ready, and I was only waiting a favourable opportunity to smash a bullet home; but it is a curious fact—I seemed obsessed with a fear of I knew not what. Possibly it was the knowledge that nothing on sea or land is as vicious as this veritable Lord of the Ocean. Every time it came to the surface we could not resist the temptation of looking over the side at this mammoth. All at once I was compelled to roar out:

“Keep back!”

At that moment the danger I had been anticipating materialised. There was a roar of water—the gigantic tail for a second lashed into the air, feet higher than the deck—then, with a dreadful crash which shivered the boat, struck the side with sickening force. The boat rocked under the shock—had it touched one of us we should have been killed instantly. Again the blow was repeated. We had fastened the line short up round the capstan and running aft, clear of the infuriated creature. I fired bullet after bullet into its bulk—seven times the missiles thudded home before its terrible flurry ceased, and we could look over the side in safety at the muscle-quivering but lifeless body.

With as little delay as possible we towed it back to Taboga just in time to get a series of photographs, and early next morning I commenced my work of dissection. Its measurements were 20 feet 9 inches in length, 11 feet 7 inches in girth, and the jaws were 7 feet 4 inches in circumference, its weight being 1,760 pounds. The teeth, which are totally unlike the shovel-nose, sand-, or white shark, were curved, as can be seen in the photograph, and the hide is different from that of

other members of the family, being very much finer in texture.

On opening it I could discover no evidences within of piscatory feeding, but the remains of its recent depredations were most remarkable. These consisted of part of the fore leg and hind leg, vertebræ, ribs, and shoulder-blade of a bull, bullock, or cow, the remains of four pelicans, two sea-hawks, two cormorants, and a number of other bones I could not identify. One or two small coasting cattle-boats pass up and down the coast, and no doubt a dead beast had been thrown overboard, to be rent and consumed by the fish, which was evidently following the boat.

Towards midday, when I had nearly finished my work, the President arrived on an unexpected visit, and he and his party evinced the greatest surprise when I showed him the contents of the stomach. After removing the jaws, I found they would easily encircle two men standing back to back, passing over their heads to the ground with ease.

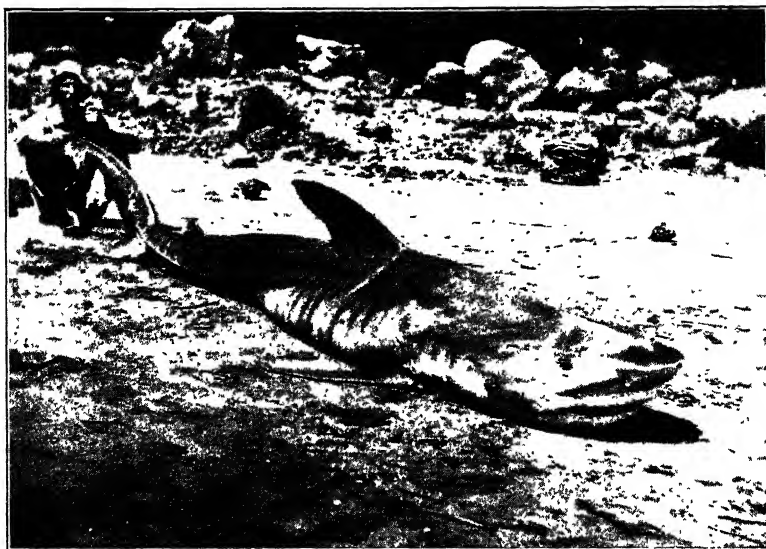
During the next few days we caught several more big fish—shovel-nose up to 1,100 pounds, and three more saw-fish, the heaviest weighing just on 4,000 pounds.

Several times I had been asked to explore the Chepo and Bayano River. Although the double name might lead people to believe there are two rivers, it is really only one, as for some reason, after the Chepo has run inland for a few miles, it is then called the Bayano.

Running over to Panama, I lunched with the Minister of Finance, Dr. Eusibio Morales, who strongly advised me to go there.

"You'll find a tremendous lot to interest you," he said, "and there's a creek some miles up which, I believe, holds enormous crocodiles—at least so it is reported."

I went to his office with him, where he very kindly gave me all the details he could. I at once saw that the entrance to this river would be very difficult, but on my return I had fully made up my mind to try it,



SIDE VIEW OF TIGER SHARK (p. 265)
Weight, 1,760 lb



TIGER-SHARK, SHOWING CURVED TEETH (p. 265).

and the next two or three days were fully occupied in loading up with stores, petrol, and everything I could think of as being necessary for the attempt.

The day we had decided to start the wind was blowing in hard from outside, but the next morning conditions were ideal. We left Taboga, passing outside Taboguilla, steering east-south-east. On our journey we saw numbers of fish playing on the surface of the water—bonito, skipper-jacks, schools of porpoises, and twice in the distance we noticed whales blowing. Due south, like smudges on the horizon, we picked up the outlying rocky sentinels of the Pearl Islands, and proceeding steadily onwards, shortly after could faintly see the outline of Chepillo Island, lying about a mile and a half offshore at the mouth of the Chepo River.

As we came closer, what looked almost like a channel through the sea, differing in colour from the rest of the water, denoted how the river, emptying, created a current far out. We followed this for some time until we arrived close in to Chepillo. The broad sand-bars of the river were now plainly visible, while near the island appeared a rocky reef.

I realised navigation would be even more difficult than I had anticipated, owing to the muddy water pouring out and obscuring all view of rocks that might lie below the surface.

Creeping close in, I made for what looked like an opening, sending Robbie forward to sound continually.

"Deep water, three fathoms," he was chanting, as we crept on.

"Two fathoms, plenty of water."

We were just through, with apparently plain sailing ahead of us. Suddenly he yelled out :

"Stop !"

Too late ! Grinding and bumping we were fast aground. I immediately stopped the engine—the bottom had suddenly shallowed, the danger being completely hidden by the muddy water of the river, which was running out hard with the tide. The lead had

completely fooled us owing to the sharpness of the rise.

We were now in a perilous position. It was impossible to reverse the engine and go astern, as the blades of the whirling propeller would have been smashed on the rocks. There was only one thing to do—hope for the best, and remain where we were until the outgoing tide turned and we could float off on high water. By the time this could happen it would be dark, and in this veritable maze of reefs and sandy shoals, to go ahead (even if it were possible) would be madness, for I had yet to find out how badly the boat was damaged.

As the water became lower, we commenced to heel over, the yacht tilting at a really perilous angle. We were evidently on a ledge of some sort, and I was afraid that any minute she might fall completely over on her side, but fortunately this did not happen. We were quickly left high and dry—so that we could clamber down the side, walk round, and examine her thoroughly. This we did with a "let's-know-the-worst" feeling. I saw at once that one of the copper plates had been torn and peeled off the bottom, but it was the propeller I was worried about. It was badly bent, and one of the blades had two pieces cut completely out of it. We straightened it as best we could with our tools until it looked serviceable. The shaft had apparently stood the shock all right, no fracture being discovered.

"I don't think any vital damage has been done," I said, "and as far as I can see, if we ever get out of this confounded hole, there's no reason why we shouldn't continue our journey; but for the life of me I can't think how we are going to get out."

As dusk was falling the tide commenced to make in. Gradually the yacht righted, until at last, quivering and bumping, we floated off, but it was now almost dark. The current was running in strongly up the river, and slowly we moved with it. I got Robbie and the boy into the dinghy with a rope fixed to our bow. I did not dare risk starting up the engine, fearing that

if I did so the propeller might be smashed up on hidden rocks, so told them to guide the yacht by rowing.

Shortly after this we ran aground again, but this time on sand, and I was indeed glad when we floated off once more, for we were bumping badly, owing to a roll, caused by the river running out, meeting the incoming tide. We traversed about a hundred yards farther, but the darkness, which could almost be felt, wrapping us in made further progress impossible. We dropped our anchor, hoping for the best, but before daylight we were fully aware we should be left stranded high and dry.

I always carried distress signals with me, and now in desperation lit one. The red glare blazed out, lighting everything round. About ten minutes later I lit another. After six had been burnt, apparently from nowhere I heard a hail. We searched the impenetrable blackness but could see nothing. Again came the hail. It seemed almost under our bow, and, peering down, we could see two natives in a little dug-out. I really felt like embracing them.

They came on board, and I explained to them the difficulty we were in, and found that, had I tried my hardest, I could not have chosen a worse place to enter the river.

"Can you possibly get us out of this?" I asked them.

They thought they could. On their advice, although it seemed madness, I started the engine, and took the wheel, while they sat either side of me, and with the dinghy and their dug-out fixed astern, we slowly moved off.

We now had an exhibition of the almost uncanny sense of direction possessed by these two men. Going dead slow, zigzagging first to port and then to starboard, we seemed to turn almost completely round—yet without grounding on we went. It was impossible to see a yard in front of the boat, but these two natives, with an assurance which was past belief, guided us

through the maze of sand-shoals ultimately into deep water. After over an hour, they motioned for the anchor to be dropped. Down it went in 6 fathoms. I had no idea whether we were at sea or up the river, but they assured me it was the latter.

When I wanted to remunerate them, these good chaps were most unwilling to accept anything: civilised peoples have much to learn in regard to brotherly love from the simple natives whom they regard with a certain amount of contempt as not being as cultured as they are—which personally I consider a blessing. After some persuasion I got them to accept some tinned food, and with this they departed joyfully, promising us that when we returned, which would be in a week or two, from up the river, they would meet us and pilot us safely out to sea.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MIGHTY CROCODILES OF THE BAYANO RIVER

WE were all up at daybreak, and were astonished to see that, having passed through the pitfalls at the entrance, we were now anchored about 50 yards off shore in a broad deep river. The turgid current was running out, and on the opposite side to which we were lying broad mud flats extended for some distance. The river here, I should think, was at least three-quarters of a mile broad.

Early in the day we proceeded upstream. A very short distance ahead on the left bank we came to a little settlement. How people could ever live there was more than I could think. They must spend their lives in being eaten alive by the myriads of mosquitoes and sandflies that swarm here in clouds, and they can never be free from malaria in sodden, wretched little thatched mud huts. How they exist is a mystery.

They waved to us—our appearance was a break in the monotony of their lives. We stopped and gave them a few tins of corned beef, etc., their delight being almost pathetic. Poor things! and yet I have seen sights in the slums of London, New York, and Paris, the wealthiest cities in the world, that were infinitely worse.

As we continued on our way, numerous small streams ran into the main river, while the bush became denser the farther we got from the sea. About 12 miles from the mouth, we stopped at the entrance to a broad creek, and getting into the dinghy with our guns, determined to row up and hunt for crocodiles, or whatever else we might encounter in this virgin wild. Numbers

of small blue-and-white cranes continually flew backwards and forwards, while gorgeous coloured butterflies and small birds flitted in and out amongst the bordering foliage. With a rushing sound a flock of duck, very like curlew, whistled close over our heads—so sudden was their appearance that I had no time to use my shot-gun, though they would have made a welcome addition to the pot. A little later, densely packed, I saw more coming, and this time I was ready for them, killing seven with one shot. When retrieved from the water into which they had fallen, we found several were pure white, with the long curved yellow beak of the curlew, while others were brown. I should think they weighed over 4 pounds each, and no connoisseur could have found fault with the feast we had afterwards.

We traversed this stream until it narrowed to such an extent that we could go no farther, without seeing a sign of a crocodile ; but on our return, creeping along slowly, an ocelot dashed through the bush in full view, but its movement was too rapid to enable me to get a sight for the rifle.

After our return to the yacht, about two miles farther on we saw another little opening, but there was no mistake about what was lying on the mud flat at the entrance. As we approached closer, up went a hideous head, while a greyish mass slithered almost silently from off the ooze beneath the water. We counted nine thumping big crocodiles in all as we were approaching, but when we arrived not a sign of one was visible. The main channel here ran deep almost up to the banks, and we anchored about 15 yards out.

"We'll not go up in the dinghy yet," I said to Lady Brown. "Let's have a little rifle practice from the deck—they're certain to return."

As I spoke, with hardly a ripple to denote its stealthy movement, the head and back of one of the saurians appeared floating on the water like a log. It was only about 20 yards away, and making up the creek. Sighting for the head, I fired. We plainly heard the smash

of the bullet as it drove home, shattering the hard bone. In a boiling vortex the reptile vanished; the head and the front feet rose again almost immediately, then slowly it sank, quite dead—the expanding ‘303 had done its work. The water was very shallow where it disappeared, and taking a rope in the dinghy, we rowed to the spot. On the mud beneath the surface it lay. It did not take long to get a hitch round it, and afterwards with much difficulty we dragged it into the still shallower water near the bank. The river here is tidal, so, when the falling tide left the carcass fully exposed, we were able to photograph it.

I had brought my rifle with me, so we paddled slowly up the creek. There is a sharp bend about 300 yards from where it enters the main channel, and as we rounded this, behind some overhanging foliage within 50 yards of us lay three enormous crocodiles, basking quite unsuspectingly in the sun. They had not heard us, so stealthily had we crept up, and picking out the largest, I fired. With a grunt it reared in the air, sending the slime flying in all directions with its powerful tail. It struggled violently to reach the water, but I saw it was mortally wounded and suddenly ceased to move. On getting close up it appeared to be a mighty specimen, measuring nearly 22 feet in length. It is curious what a foetid smell these reptiles have even when alive, but the stench after they have been dead a couple of days is overpowering. It is unlike anything else, and is the most awful smell I know.

We continued up the creek, the scenery being really beautiful. Several large coco-nut palms had fallen over the stream, one which had dropped completely across making a wonderful natural bridge. Flowering vines and creepers had covered the trunk, and trailing to the water formed a perfect arch of exotic greenery. Just beyond this on some exposed gnarled roots we saw another crocodile, but took no notice of it—we wanted the really big ones, and rather despised a ten- or twelve-footer.

The banks were rapidly narrowing here, and lily beds stretched across what little open space there was to navigate, until at last we found we could get no further. The jungle appeared more open here, so we landed, keeping a wary eye for the deadly bush master snake, and the innumerable other dangers one usually finds in the primitive wilds. Both of us carried guns in our belts as well as a rifle, and of course we were wearing top-boots and breeches—the person who attempts to go through a jungle otherwise attired must be a double-distilled fool. The leather of the boot gives protection against snakes, centipedes, scorpions, as well as considerable help against the ticks which infest the more open country where long grass grows. We were badly bothered here by mosquitoes—I think every single classified member of the species occurs up the Bayano—and it would really seem as if there were a host of unknown varieties as well, but it is astonishing what one can get used to.

After we had penetrated for about two hundred yards we saw a family of racoons at play. They were going through the most amusing antics, rolling over together, jumping on top of one another, leaping into the air, little dreaming they were being watched by a two-legged animal. We left them in their happy state, though we could have killed them easily.

On coming to a patch of marshy ground, the trail of a large member of the cat family could plainly be seen. It must have been a very large one—judging by the size of its spoor a jaguar or puma, though here also can be found what is known as the "black tiger." This is not a separate species, but merely a melanic form of jaguar.

There was nothing particularly interesting to be seen, and there was no object in meandering round to get eaten alive by insects; we therefore returned to the dinghy, and so back to the yacht. When we reached the bend where I had killed the big crocodile in our passage up, we ceased rowing and crept slowly down by

pulling ourselves along with the aid of the reeds and rushes which everywhere overhung the water. Cuddled in close to the bank we approached.

Ye gods ! what a sight ! The sun was now blazing down from overhead, turning the slime on the flattened bank into a species of hot mud-bath, and stretched out full length were no less than fifteen crocodiles wallowing and basking in blissful ignorance of our nearness.

" I really don't know whether it is safe to fire at the brutes while in this tiny cockleshell," I whispered.

Robbie, who accompanied me, was quite certain it would be madness—he had horrible visions of the reptiles coming down *en masse* at the charge.

" No," I said. " I think the game is really too risky : if we wounded one, the result would probably be disastrous, and it's no good taking unnecessary chances."

When we came out in full view from under the bank, these reptiles were certainly astonished, and made off full tilt into the water. The rate at which these brutes can travel is remarkable—though apparently so slothful, when necessity arises their movements are rapid in the extreme. One has only to think to realise this must be so, otherwise how would it be possible for them to catch fish, etc., on which they largely exist ?

After they had all disappeared, swimming ahead of us, as we could see from the bubbles and mud they turned up from the bottom, we followed. Close to the mouth of the creek the bank on the right-hand side is low and flat, with giant mangrove trees growing quite 80 to 100 feet in the air, but on the opposite side the ground, steeply shelving, rises up about 8 feet above the stream. As we drifted down, I noticed two or three of the big reptiles had crept up the slopes, and were lying asleep, almost covered by the dense bush on the top.

Standing up, I sighted as well as I could and fired. At once with a loud crashing of undergrowth, several shot over the edge, and with terrific plunges smashed into the water, but the one I had aimed at remained quite motionless.

"By Jove!" I exclaimed, "I've killed him stone dead."

We crossed over, and crawling up the side with difficulty, cautiously approached the inert form. There is no doubt I should have given it another bullet to make sure—we were practically up against it when it galvanised into life. We leaped backwards—I had no time to plug it again, and doubt whether, if it had attacked, we should have been able to save ourselves from the onslaught, but fortunately it didn't. With a rush it went over the edge—crash into the water below—my bullet had evidently only stunned it.

We were much shaken by this incident, for there are no more evil-looking brutes in this world than crocodiles or alligators, and to see this twenty-footer suddenly come to life when we were almost on top of it was enough to shake anybody's nerves.

I have met many people in my life who have told me they have never known what fear meant and were afraid of nothing. I wished then that I were like them, for I have certainly known fear. I think I am really a timid man, and rather believe at times I have been downright cowardly; but certain it is that I can imagine no more horrible death than being seized, carried beneath the water, and subsequently devoured by one of these filthy reptiles. Of the two, I really fancy I prefer the shark.

We did no more shooting. After getting on board we sat drinking tea and admiring the beauties of the river. As the sun set, innumerable birds from every direction commenced to congregate in the mangrove trees on the shore close to us. At last such numbers assembled that every branch seemed alive with them, the blue and white cranes, curlew-like duck, and crab-catchers all making this their nocturnal resting-place. Overhead numbers of parrots crossed the river, filling the air with their curious medley of sound, and as darkness closed in, the stillness and peace of the utter wilds settled upon us. Fireflies and fire-beetles flew among

the trees and bushes, flashing like meteors. Every now and then the heavy splash of a crocodile and the harsh strident shrieks of a variety of night-birds would jar the silence.

We were badly worried by mosquitoes at night—such a pest were they that when we arose at day-break we were not very much refreshed by our broken sleep.

Before the sun sucked up the vapours, a heavy miasmic mist, like the steam of a Turkish bath, covered everything. In the grey of the morning all things are grey, and there was very little difference between the atmosphere and our own feelings. However, after some good hot coffee and a substantial breakfast we felt better, determined to have another day's hunting, and decided to row up to where we had seen the fifteen crocodiles the afternoon before. Just before we reached the place we came upon a low-lying bank on which lay a big crocodile. Up till then it had not seen us, but just as I was about to pull on it, off it moved. I let fly, but did not see where the bullet struck, though I knew from the surge of water and smashing of its tail I had found my mark. As we rowed forward to look for it, we were all three nearly shot out of the boat. Right beneath us the crocodile, which had only been wounded, rose, at the same time lashing with its tail, flooding us with water—then came at us with mouth wide open. Its dripping jaws were within a foot of Lady Brown, who was sitting in the stern. The enraged brute, I thought, must surely seize her, and overturn us.

I could not fire—she was almost dead in line, and with the rocking of the boat it would have been madness to risk it. With remarkable presence of mind, without hesitating a second (if she had it would certainly have meant death for her), she whipped the automatic from her belt, and fired three times into the gaping horrible mouth, and as it swirled away from the shock, I snapped it with my rifle, and knew by the thud that I

had got home. Lady Brown was as white as a sheet, and I was shaking as if with ague.

"My God!" I said, "that's the nearest thing I've ever seen! If you hadn't used your automatic, nothing could have saved you."

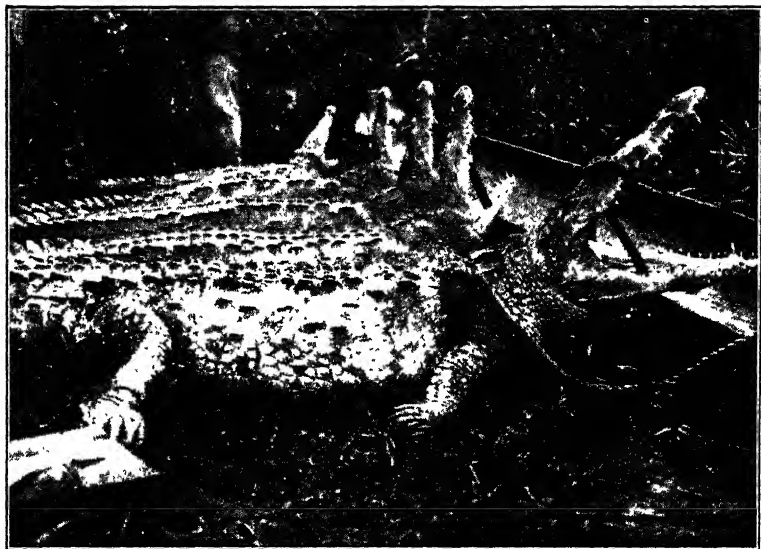
The body had sunk out of sight, and try as we could we were unable to recover it. We were much too shaken to hunt further, so returned to the *Cara*.

That afternoon, from the security of the deck, we killed no less than five and the next day ran up to where the Mamoni River joins the Bayano. The former has a considerable breadth and flow, but where it enters the main channel beware! For most unexpectedly, right in the centre, a great rock juts up. At high water it is about 3 feet below the surface, though when the tide falls the danger is fully exposed. When we arrived here fortunately we could see it. It certainly would mean the complete wreck of any boat that unknowingly drove on to it.

We went up the Mamoni for some distance, but found nothing of particular interest. Anchoring that night at the mouth, we returned next day to the creek where we had so narrowly escaped death from the wounded crocodile. I had had enough of shooting here, but badly wanted to get some curlew duck, whose favourite feeding-ground I knew was where the stream narrowed, and went up after them in the dinghy. We got about eight, and were returning when, floating upstream we saw a strange sight—a dead crocodile with the yellowish white belly uppermost; and perched on it were nine vultures endeavouring to tear it open from the vent. It passed close to us, the birds not taking the slightest notice, or concerning themselves in the least at our presence.

"I wonder if that's the brute that attacked us?" I said.

Driving off the filthy passengers, we got hold of it by the tail and pulled it to the shore. Sure enough it was the very one—there could not be the slightest



CROCODILES OF THE BAYANO (p. 273)
Five of them, a day's shoot, measured from 18½ to 23 ft



"THE LITTLE CROCODILE CAME TO LIFE WHILE LADY BROWN WAS
HOLDING IT" (p. 279).

mistake about it, for on prising open its jaws, inside were the marks that were clear evidence of Lady Brown's automatic. We made up our minds to preserve the head as a memento of our narrow escape. After a lot of trouble I managed to sever it, though the stench was abominable.

Just before we arrived back on the yacht I noticed in some reeds the first really small one I had seen. Picking up my shot-gun, I waited until we had crept up within 6 feet of it—then fired into the water close to the head. As I had hoped, the concussion momentarily stunned it, and we grabbed the little devil, and put it in the dinghy.

"What are we going to do with it?" asked Lady Brown.

"I'm going to get a really good photograph, and want to take you holding it—it'll come to life presently."

I showed her how it would have to be held to prevent it biting.

We got the big head on to the yacht, and put it up in the bow with Lady Brown sitting in the capstan.

Sure enough, the little crocodile presently woke up.

"Now hold it against you," I said, "and the camera will do the rest."

In the first photograph its mouth was shut, but in the second it started to press against her, making a thin wheezing noise. I got two really excellent pictures, one of which is reproduced here, and as a reward for its good behaviour we pitched the little beggar back into the river. I don't think I should have done so, for I hate the brutes, but Lady Brown seemed to think it had earned its freedom.

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CHAPTER XVIII

WE ARE ATTACKED BY RED BUGS—BATTLE WITH A VERITABLE LEVIATHAN OF THE DEEP

WE now left for good and proceeded up the river, passing where the Mamoni entered, giving the rock a wide berth.

About 25 miles from the sea there is a little native settlement called Jesus Maria, and a few miles farther on you reach El Llano. But it was impossible to remain at either of these places, our boat only being able to reach there on top of the tide, and being obliged to return as soon as it started to fall ; so we had to drop down a few miles, and anchor close alongside the bank, where there was always deep water.

The scenery here was truly exquisite. There was a wealth of bird life—here seemed to be the home of a rare crab catcher. I have never seen any birds' plumage more lovely than this. Paraquets and parrots were in thousands, all kinds of cranes and herons, and quite a number of doves.

The first day after our arrival we rowed up a small stream that entered the main river quite close to us. It would be impossible to do justice to the tropical foliage and beauty here : wonderful palms, and trees of every description, with flowering vines trailing from their upper branches over a hundred feet down to the water—on either bank the jungle seemed impenetrable. Frequently the trees would completely meet above, forming a dome of green verdure through which the sun's rays were hardly able to pierce. It was just like going through a tunnel. It all has to be seen to be thoroughly appreciated.

Every now and then we could hear something crashing

through the dense underbush, but it was quite impossible to see what caused the noise.

We lazed away the entire day up this little river, and on returning late in the afternoon I determined to go out that night into the jungle with my spot-light as the place where our boat was anchored appeared to be fairly open.

As soon as darkness fell, with my rifle and two guns in my belt I started off, but I had no luck. Several times I flashed the eyes of a wild pig, and I think once a jaguar (always called tiger in Central America), but had no chance of aiming before they disappeared, so tried again at daybreak, and had better luck, killing a fine young pig, with which I struggled back in triumph. After returning, we spent the rest of the day in wandering about inland, seeing numbers of beautiful tucan and other birds, and watching the jabbering monkeys swinging from tree to tree. The gambols of these human-like animals always interest me. Somehow or other they never seem to go through the same antics in the Zoological Gardens as they do in their natural home.

As evening fell, a terrific howling and barking commenced on the opposite bank, to be answered away in the bush on the side we were anchored.

"Heavenly Powers! what is it?" asked Lady Brown.

"Howler apes," I answered.

These are curious-looking monkeys, the males especially having what looks like a full beard. They are terribly human.

In the interior is also the home of the spider-monkey, so called because of its abnormally long arms and legs. I should think this would be a perfect paradise for the zoological collector. I do not understand why the London Zoological Society does not arrange for an expedition to this part of the world, for it would certainly be greatly enriched by the specimens that would undoubtedly be got, many of them, to my knowledge,

being at present quite unrepresented in the Society's collection.

We had remained here for four days when we began to suffer from an awful itch. The irritation was so dreadful that sleep was out of the question. On the fifth day Lady Brown developed fever, and by night I was seriously concerned, her temperature rising to 103. By the morning it was over 104, and it required no medical knowledge to see she was seriously ill. Throwing caution to the winds, in the grey fog of day-break I dashed full speed down the river, risking everything, as I knew her life probably depended on how quickly I could get her to the hospital in Panama. When I arrived at the mouth, I was obliged to wait, fretting and fuming, until the two natives who had rescued us from our perilous position when we first arrived could come in their dug-out and pilot us out, but when clear of the sand-banks and reefs at the entrance, I went ahead as hard as the engine could drive.

Lady Brown was lying in the cock-pit, a truly pitiable sight, her face so swollen that the eyes were completely closed up, with arms and legs covered in a scarlet rash. I was worried to death to know what infection we had picked up. By now I was in much the same state myself, and also suffering from fever, while the irritation, if possible, was worse than ever.

I wasted no time in going to Taboga, but ran straight into Balboa, and got to the Santo Tomas Hospital as quickly as possible. There they at once knew what we were suffering from. The land up the river where we had gone ashore must have been infested with a minute tick, invisible to the naked eye—in the vulgar tongue it is known as "red bug." They had got beneath our skin in thousands, setting up tick fever and an intense itch. It was over a week before the fever finally subsided, and during this period we had scratched and torn ourselves so badly that, so far as I was concerned, I must have looked like Lazarus, while the marks re-

mained for weeks after. We both agreed they were the most awful days we had ever spent. We also found that it left us terribly debilitated, while for a long time afterwards the fever returned every now and then, being intermittent in its attack, much like malaria.

We had to rest for a full fortnight after this, doing nothing but prowl about and collect shells and examine the mysterious sea-life off one or two of the islands in the vicinity.

Two years had nearly passed, and I felt it was time to think of home. Much work would have to be done before we could sail—all our collection would need to be packed, passages taken, and arrangements made for conveying the yacht to England. We had grown so much attached to the little boat that she had become like a child to us and any thought of selling her was repugnant. We had weathered storms, run on reefs, and been awfully close to death many times : there was not a plank or article in her but was reminiscent of some incident.

We agreed, before finally leaving, to have one more go at the big fish. I shall always be glad we decided to do so, because on our very last attempt we got a veritable mammoth—far and away larger than any we had previously captured.

I shall always remember the morning of the day we caught it. You may try for big fish, but no matter what your skill and knowledge of their habits may be, their size is largely a matter of luck. We had to catch sand-sharks, as usual, for bait, and then I ran out two of the big lines with a generous slab of fish impaled on each hook. It was a perfect day for fishing—hardly a ripple on the water, and everything seemed propitious and in our favour. We had not long to wait before one of the big lines moved off, and after an exciting struggle, I brought alongside another of our old friends, the shovel-nose. This was nearly 14 feet long, and weighed between 1,250 and 1,300 pounds. I could not help smiling when I thought that only a few months

ago I had become excited over a 300-pounder, while to-day this 14-foot chap left me quite cold, for I was getting quite blasé of sand-shark, shovel-nose, and even saw-fish! I suppose one can become used to everything after a time.

"I should like to catch a real whale of a fish," I said, "on this our last effort."

"We're going to," Lady Brown answered.

Now, my friend is very prophetic—I am seriously beginning to believe that she is gifted with second sight—and I had long ago, owing to the extraordinary coincidences I had seen, come to believe in her prognostications.

"What makes you think that?"

"Just a feeling I've got," she replied. "You see if my words don't come true—we're going to get an enormous fish."

A feeling of expectancy gripped me and I watched the lines carefully.

"Here's the big fish!" she called out. Sure enough, the starboard line was slowly running out. So certain did I feel that this was indeed the fish of my life that I shouted to Robbie and the boy to haul in the other line, taking no chances of an entanglement.

Creak—creak! the end was reached on the capstan. With enormous force the line was stretched out.

"My God! you're right—it's terrific!"

I had forgotten all about our anchor, but it did not matter much. The yacht rode ahead, tearing it up as if it did not exist, and now the *Cara* was being towed by a real monster. Close in to the rocky point of Taboguilla we passed—too close to please me, as I was afraid the line might foul the sunken rocks, and oh! how I wanted to land that fish! It seemed reluctant, however, to leave Panama Bay, turning slightly, and heading for the main channel that runs in past Flamenco. For about two miles it travelled in this direction, then, swimming deep, in a semicircle it made towards the island of Morro, some seven miles distant, but after

about an hour it swung more to the left, heading for our anchorage at Taboga. The weight of the *Cara* stopped us from going very fast, but whatever it was it seemed well hooked, and, barring any unforeseen event, I felt we should win in the end. We were, of course, utterly unable to guide this dogged, powerful creature, but Robbie was awaiting the moment when he could start up the engine, and if necessary, reverse against it; but for the present this was out of the question, for powerful as our line was it would have been burst like a piece of thread had we made an attempt at any tactics of the kind.

The fish now started back towards Taboguilla.

"It's circling in," I said. "How these big fellows always make for home again!"

Past the sandy beach of the island we travelled, and upon arriving off the rocky point, commenced in the same direction as when we first hooked it.

"I wonder if it's ever going to stop towing us round Panama Bay."

"Don't be impatient; and don't lose the biggest fish you've ever hooked by getting out of temper and trying to force matters. Let it take its own time—never mind how long; if you leave things alone it'll wear itself out, and in the end I'm sure you'll land it."

Sound advice, and I took it, and lighting my pipe, sat down to wait for Heaven knew how many hours before we could attempt to beach the fish. It was now travelling in a circle, first towards Flamenco, then heading for our Taboga anchorage, via Morro, and back to Taboguilla, finishing where it was originally hooked.

"I've never seen anything like it," I said. "I wonder how much longer we're going to be kept idle?"

As I spoke there came a jarring on the line. Hard back it swam, doubling on its tracks, but fortunately the yacht swung round in time to ease the strain.

We were now covering the same waters again, but in the opposite direction. Quite unexpectedly the taut line slackened, then hissed through the water in towards

us as straight underneath the boat the fish dashed. Now surely something must give—but the tackle stood the shock, though the yacht quivered as the fish was brought up short. Momentarily it appeared to be discouraged, for it commenced to sulk, moving very slowly, only a few yards at a time.

Again came a violent agitation on the rope: by the erratic motion and the strain on the capstan it was clear what was taking place. The fish was struggling madly deep down, twisting and turning to burst free. How I prayed there would be no break, though I really expected it every minute. I knew the hook must by now be driven completely through some hard portion of the mouth of whatever we had on, otherwise it would have torn clear long ago.

The fish now shot ahead in a series of short rushes. While it was swimming stolidly there was little need to worry, but I was becoming more anxious each moment—when up to the surface it came—a mighty saw appeared, to be followed by a dreadful lashing of water, and then deep down it plunged again.

"My God!" I cried, "it's a huge saw-fish; but it can't fight like this much longer, no matter how strong it may be."

It forged ahead afresh, but this time much slower—it was plain to all of us the point of exhaustion was approaching.

We were now close off the shore of Taboguilla. Nearly five hours had gone by since we struck this mighty battler, and the only excuse I can make for what followed is that the long-drawn-out fight had got on my nerves. With all the experience I had, or should have had, from the numbers of great fish captured, it is incomprehensible why, against all common sense, I should suddenly have been guilty of one of the most asinine stupidities ever heard of. I conceived the idea that as we were near inshore, by reversing the engine we could work closer still, then join on another line to that which held the fish, and fasten

the end to the dinghy, cast off at the capstan, and rapidly row the dinghy ashore, fixing the now much lengthened rope round one of the rocks, and so gradually haul the fish to the beach. It seemed quite practicable. We joined on a further hundred yards and slowly reversed the engine, creeping astern towards the beach. The fish appeared to have finally surrendered, seeming utterly exhausted. Robbie and the boy brought the dinghy round towards the bow, whereupon I dropped the yacht's anchor and stopped the engine. Throwing the line off from the capstan, I got quickly into the little boat, and we started to pull towards land. This we had almost reached when, with a violent jerk, the line tightened on the stern of the dinghy to which it was fastened.

"My God! it's off again!" I exclaimed.

We struggled madly to reach the shore, realising there was nobody on board but Lady Brown, who certainly could not get the anchor up, start the engine alone, and come to our rescue. Robbie and the boy were frightened to death, for the little dinghy was being towed out backwards. Quite helpless, faster and still faster out to sea we were being dragged. Freed from the encumbrance of the yacht, our trifling weight was of no consequence to the fish. We had shot about fifty yards past the *Cara* when the dinghy, by reason of its being towed stern first, slewed sideways, and turned turtle, flinging the three of us into the water. For a minute or two I hung on to the partially submerged boat, which now empty, though water-logged, would not sink, but quickly realised the absurdity of this, for I was being drawn away still farther from the yacht. Robbie and the boy (both splendid swimmers) reached the *Cara* in no time, and with Lady Brown's assistance scrambled on board, and I promptly followed their example. From the deck we could see the dinghy disappearing in the distance, bobbing up and down like a cork, and getting the anchor up as quickly as we could, started up the engine and raced after it. We soon caught

up, running close alongside. The oars had disappeared—goodness knows where they had gone to—and at this moment the bottom board parted company. Robbie made an ineffectual grab with the iron hook as it swirled past, but missed, and it was seeing him make this attempt that gave me an idea. Regulating our speed to the same pace as that of the fish, we reached down to where the line was fastened to the stern of the dinghy, and getting the iron hook round it, then went ahead a little faster. By hauling all together we managed to get the rope up, and fixed again round the yacht's capstan. Once more this giant fighter had the yacht to tow, and we could have a few minutes' breathing-space.

The first thing Lady Brown said to me was :

"It serves you right! You brought it on yourself—it's a miracle you weren't drowned."

It was quite true—I had brought it on myself, though, thank goodness, no great damage had been done.

We had saved the dinghy, which, in the meantime still submerged, had been tied to our stern. The fish as soon as it felt the weight of the yacht had scarcely moved, so reversing the engine slowly, almost foot by foot we worked back towards Taboguilla.

The tide was nearly full, and I decided to choose—as once before—a sandy spot, and using the utmost care, nosed the bow of the *Cara* in; but before doing that we got the handle on the little windlass, and commenced to wind until we had retrieved about 150 yards of the rope attached to the mighty brute—then, as the yacht touched the bottom, we flung the spare line overboard, Robbie and the boy jumped off, and made it fast to some great rocks close to the water's edge, while I backed out, and anchored the yacht off shore.

Another quandary now arose—how were Lady Brown and I going to land? We had no oars with which to row the little boat, but when I baled her out, we got over this little difficulty by paddling with two flat

pieces of wood which I broke off an old box used for carrying our potatoes.

After much struggling and working we finally manipulated the fish into the shallow water, though how we managed it I really don't know. Of course every time we got in a yard or two of line, we gave it a turn round the rocks, while we had a breathing-space, otherwise we could never have done it ; after which all we had to do was wait until the receding tide exposed the monster.

Although we had first struck this fish early in the morning, it was now round 4 o'clock, and I knew that it was out of the question to take a series of photographs and perform the autopsy that day, for it would be an hour or two before the tide receded sufficiently for us to get to work. There was nothing to do but go back to Taboga for help, which was quickly obtained, the *Cara* returning with a whole crowd of natives, and we all commenced to haul.

The fish seemed quite dead, but to make sure, as soon as its head appeared, I plugged two bullets into it, and there was evidently some life left, for the saw reared up, then smashed straight down flat with a terrific spank on the water, while the brute gave two or three convulsive shudders. Blood spurted several feet into the air, dyeing the water around oily red. By wading out we succeeded in getting a three-quarter-inch manilla rope round the tail, and by stupendous efforts the fish was finally beached.

By the time we had finished it was getting on towards dark. I knew the carcass was in no danger of being torn to pieces during the night by vultures, but that it would be necessary for me to get there at daybreak to drive off the swarms that would be certain to congregate. The big fish was now so high up that only a very small section of it would be covered when the water was full in, so it was safe from the depredations of shark ; and like this I left it, to commence work as soon as it was light.

It was a colossal fish. I had not yet ascertained the

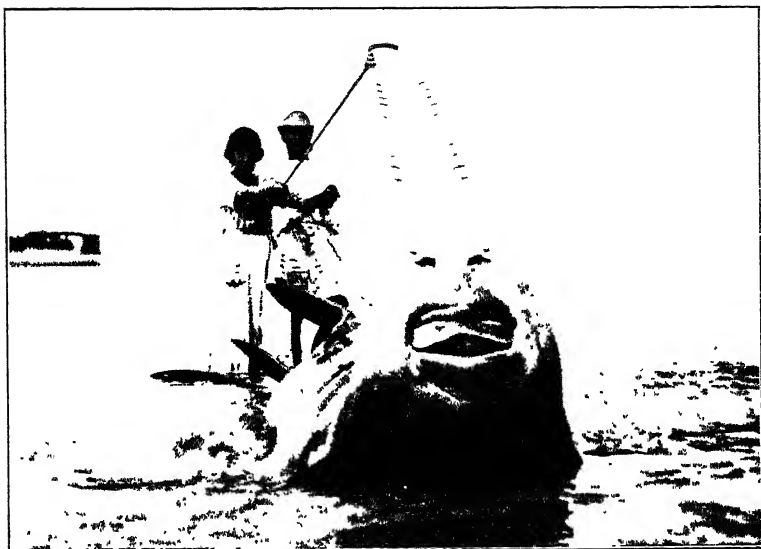
weight or measurements, preferring to wait until I could make one job of it.

We were on the scene at daybreak, and found the huge bulk intact. As soon as the sun rose we got a series of photographs, measured and ascertained the weight. It was 31 feet in length, 21 feet in girth; the saw was 6 feet 5 inches in length, and its total weight round 5,700 pounds. When this was finished I commenced the autopsy.

At once I saw that it was a female fish, and on opening it, as I suspected, I discovered it to be the mother of a large family. They were contained in a double womb, situated on either side of the stomachal wall, and behind the liver, which was simply enormous. The ovarial attachment was pale yellow in colour, and upon opening, the viscous substance appeared almost exactly the same as custard. Each was separately attached to the mother by a cord—in all there were thirty-six foetal saw-fish.

I believe that for some time it has been a point for discussion among scientists whether a saw-fish develops its curious projection after birth or before; or, if born with the saw, whether the teeth on it evolve at a later stage. The discovery of these embryonic young now settled the question definitely. Saw-fish are born with both saw and teeth. Nature, by covering the sharp projections on either side with a membranous covering, obviates in this wonderful way all irritation which might be caused to the womb. The saw itself, in proportion to the size of the foetus, is very large, and quite flexible. After close examination I came to the conclusion that this membranous covering shrivels back from the teeth after birth, leaving them fully exposed, but still remains on the hard bone of the saw.

Apart from the thirty-six young, placed higher up was a quantity of ova, graduating in size, the largest measuring $14\frac{3}{4}$ inches in circumference. They appeared to be in series, each section becoming smaller the farther up it stretched.



LADY BROWN AND THE AUTHOR WITH SAWFISH, 31 FT. LONG
WEIGHING 5 700 LB (p 290)



FŒTAL SAWFISH ATTACHED TO OVA (p. 291)



FŒTAL SAWFISH ON PARENT'S CARCASE (p. 291)



OVA OF SAWFISH (p. 291).

The photographs we were enabled to take show the mother, the young attached to the ova and, after they were removed, lying on the carcase. In this latter photograph the light in places penetrated the membrane, and in one or two instances plainly shows the teeth ; while another photograph shows the size of some of the ova which we are holding in comparison with that of our hands.

I was able to preserve the foetal saw-fish in spirits, and found on return to this country that neither the Royal College of Surgeons Museum nor the South Kensington Museum had any specimens, and was glad to be able to present them, together with a series of photographs.

CHAPTER XIX

A FEW OBSERVATIONS ON THE CURIOUS HABITS OF FISH— WE RETURN HOME

I SHALL now give some of my practical deductions following close observation of fish extending over a considerable period and embracing various species. It was only by actually capturing and performing autopsies that this was possible.

There is undoubtedly an immense field for research work in this direction, which might easily lead to many important discoveries, with the probable result of much benefit to the human race.

My medical knowledge being very small, it was largely through the good offices of Dr. Casey, who, as I have already said, came from Texas and stayed with me for some time, Pathologist to the Santo Tomas Hospital and to the Government, at Balboa that I was able to establish various diseases in fish.

Quite a number of the shark family, and principally the shovel-nose, suffer from osteoma. The following is an extract from a letter I received from Major Bock, Medical Corps, U.S.A., and Superintendent of the Santo Tomas Hospital, which illustrates how I was able to identify various diseases :

“ The portion of the spinal column of a shark which you left with me charged with the request that the tumour-like growth appearing thereon should be examined microscopically to determine whether or not this abnormality might be malignant in character, I now wish to inform you that the laboratory has reported as follows upon the new growth :

' *Gross note.*—A mass consisting chiefly of 'spongy' bony tissue, with areas more dense in character.

" *Microscopic report.*—Osteoma, well calcified bone with cellular structure and that appears normal.

"From the foregoing report you will observe that the pathological mass found upon the spinal column of the shark is not malignant in character, and is in all probability a tumour of benign nature."

As I previously mentioned, the shark I caught in Kingston Harbour disclosed one of these growths. On discussing this question of the local rigidity of the spinal column undoubtedly produced by this, there is little doubt that, certainly where the growth occurs, the spinal column being no longer flexible, a species of paralysis must result, which would change the feeding habits of the fish, as it could no longer possess the considerable speed necessary to capture its usual prey—i.e. other fish. It is possible also that by destruction of nerve centres which lie along the vertebræ, fish madness might easily result. I noticed particularly that all sand and shovel-nose sharks suffering in this manner were of abnormal girth. This could not possibly have been a coincidence, as there were no exceptions.

The healing power of the flesh of these fish is most remarkable. I have caught them with gashes, and even great chunks torn out of them, which one would have thought must have resulted in death—yet nature has healed and restored them to their full vitality. In several cases the pectoral fin was severed from the body, and in one instance the tail had completely disappeared, leaving only a stump. In the terrific fights they engage in no doubt many are killed, but it is quite surprising what a large percentage of maimed fish I caught.

Not once did I discover the head or nose exhibiting old wounds—their method of attack therefore cannot

be a head-on charge, otherwise I should certainly have found evidences in the form of scars.

On several occasions I have found, apart from spinal growths, both large and small watery tumours, sometimes singly, and again as many as five or six, attached to the wall of the stomach, and in female fish also in the womb. Again on several occasions, not only with sharks, but also once with tarpon and once with red snapper, the autopsy disclosed a repulsive-looking growth which really appeared malignant. It is impossible for me to assert that this was cancer, but its appearance was highly suspicious.

The liver of the shark, which occupies the greater part of the interior, frequently shows signs of disease, but I was unable to discover anything about this. In sand-sharks particularly a form of ichthyoid tuberculosis is very prevalent. I carefully kept records of 100 captures, and found nearly 80 per cent. of the females affected, whereas the males were very much freer, just over 50 per cent. suffering from this disease.

Some time ago, after an article of mine in the *Daily Mail* on the tope (a small species of shark inhabiting the waters round Great Britain), *Punch* rather pulled my leg. The writer warned people to be careful of being bitten by them, as fish suffered from pyorrhœa, etc., and I really think this was what first caused me to examine carefully the teeth and jaws of all fish I captured. I am not suggesting that fish suffer from the aforesaid trouble, but what I do assert is that in several cases I have seen a curious disease one might almost call it inflammation of the jaw tissue (analogous to our gums) in which the roots of the teeth are embedded, and also once the bone itself had become eaten away; but whether these injuries were caused by biting on something abnormally hard or not it is, of course, impossible for me to say.

The jaw strength of all fish is tremendous—there is certainly nothing on land to equal it. Even comparatively insignificant inhabitants of the sea are able to



PERFORMING AUTOPSY ON SHARKS (p. 294).



NOSE RAISED TO SHOW TEETH (p. 295).

do considerable damage. The greatest care should always be exercised in removing the hook from the mouth of a fish, while, apart from the ray, there are quite a number that have sharp bony spikes projecting outward, which in several cases are highly poisonous.

Spanish mackerel, and to a lesser degree corbina, unquestionably suffer from trichina, the appearance of this disgusting white worm being very similar to that so well known in swine. I remember on one occasion in Panama my hostess was expatiating on the fine Spanish mackerel she had bought that morning, which we were to have for lunch. Under the pretext of being interested in their size, I examined them. They had already been opened and cleaned—sure enough, where cut in half, several of the worms were exposed. Just before the meal was served I felt very unwell, and unable to eat anything—for reasons which will be appreciated! As a matter of fact, after one has done little else for nearly two years but perform abdominal operations on fish, one doesn't exactly yearn to eat them, especially after what I had seen!

I was able on several occasions to witness the way sharks capture their prey. Contrary to popular belief, they do not turn on their back or side when opening their mouth to seize any object, but dash straight forward at immense speed. The nose rises just before striking, disclosing the teeth fully bared. These, which are ordinarily enclosed in sheaths, corresponding to the rows of teeth, and in much the same fashion as a cat's claw, are exposed at will. The photograph shows how, as the nose rises, the teeth are in evidence.

I recently saw a picture in a well-known paper which described a "true and remarkable feat." It showed a man fighting a shark in the water—one arm was completely round it, the other upraised, holding a knife as if about to plunge it into the fish. To the ordinary observer it was, no doubt, a wonderful and thrilling

photograph. I showed it to several people, and asked them if they noticed anything ridiculous about it. They examined it carefully, but could see nothing wrong, until I pointed out the fact that this marvellous fish *had no dorsal fin*—an excellent example of how the public are fooled.

The big jack, in feeding on live mullet, etc., which are usually close to the surface, dash at their victim with a great bursting and smashing, the spray flying in every direction, frightening the fish so badly that no doubt it is utterly bewildered, and is then easily seized.

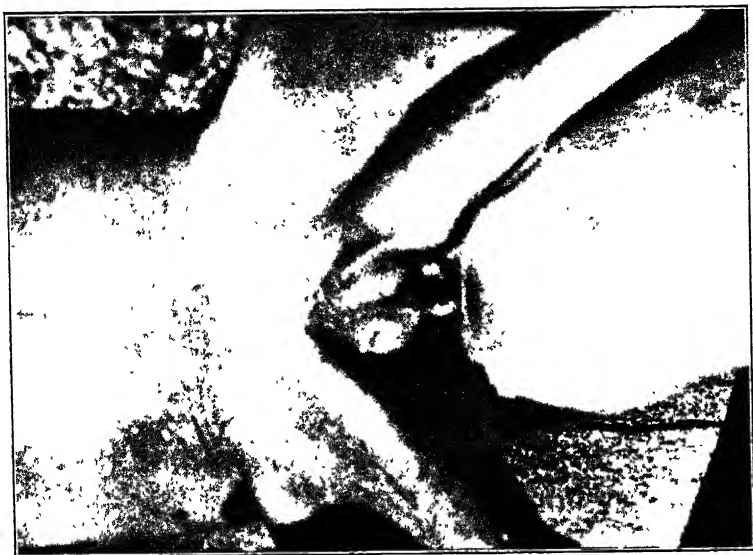
I have seen tarpon leap into the air after a jumping fish that was endeavouring to escape; but I have no knowledge of how the saw-fish captures its prey—it is possible its saw may have something to do with it.

A moving object is essential to catch barracouda—either a live bait, or trolling with a big spoon.

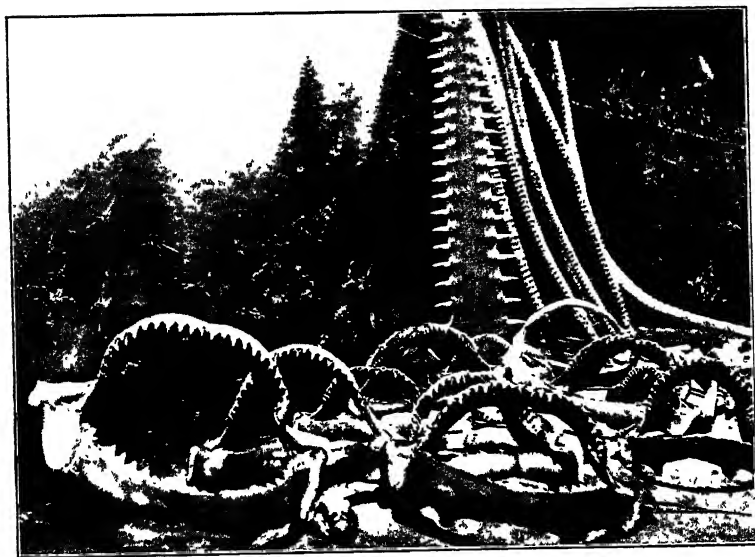
To me one of the most interesting studies of all was the method of propagation of the various members of the shark family, saw-fish, and ray. The ordinary method of spawning is so well known that it is unnecessary for me to describe this, except to say that the ova after being deposited by the female are immediately afterwards fertilised by the male, and the then fertilised eggs, left to themselves, in due course hatch out immature fish; but with the shark family the *modus operandi* is totally different. One might almost say they are surprisingly human.

The male shark is provided with two arms or claspers, situated either side of its genital organs. In the female these are absent, but she is furnished with two small flat pad-like fins, which, no doubt, afford protection for the female part.

During the breeding-season the method of copulation is very similar to mammals, and the spermatozoon of the male, impregnating the female, fertilises the waiting eggs within. During the period of gestation which



GENITALIA OF MALE SHARK (p. 296).



JAWS, VERTEBRÆ, ETC., BROUGHT HOME (p. 298).

follows, the young sharks form within the womb of the female shark in exactly the same manner as a child does, and—like the tiny saw-fish I have already described—in due course are born a perfect miniature reproduction of the mother and father, and at once swim close alongside the mother, as little pigs follow the sow or chickens the hen.

Unlike the saw-fish, which is born with saw and teeth complete, on first coming into the world they have no teeth, the interior of the mouth being perfectly smooth. These evolve subsequently, and here again I must destroy the belief that the number of rows of teeth in a shark denote its age, for the jaws of one I have brought home, which only weighed 8 or 9 pounds, exhibit precisely the same number of teeth and rows as a fully grown adult of the same species.

Both female and male guard their young for some time after they are born, in much the same way as the male and female swan, who are nearly always seen together with the cygnets; and to my knowledge, in the case of the shovel-nose shark, when danger is at hand, or on the little ones becoming tired, they are actually taken within her mouth; as I pointed out before, the teeth only being exposed at will, the interior is otherwise perfectly smooth.

I removed some young sharks from the womb of a female (Lady Brown can be seen in the photograph holding up two), no doubt shortly before they would have been born naturally, and when I afterwards placed them in the sea, they were able to swim away, apparently none the worse for their premature birth.

Both the whip- and sting-ray bear their young perfect, and in the embryonic state they are most curious-looking objects. The vitality of the shark and ray is almost past belief. One occasion Dr. Casey opened the belly of a sand-shark from the vent to beyond the gills, after which it swam away vigorously, though of course it would not live. After removing the heart,

which is three-chambered, from freshly caught shovel-nose, tiger-, white, or sand-sharks, it continues to pulsate for about twenty minutes. The photograph shows Lady Brown and Dr. Casey examining a still pulsating heart removed from a big shovel-nose.

The tenacity of life of the sting-ray has to be experienced to be really understood. This was explained in an article I wrote for the *Daily Express* some time ago.

After firing several bullets through the head, pulping it with a heavy log of wood, and completely severing the body, each half still retained life.

The muscular movement of the shark family is also very curious. Many times after performing an autopsy, when the fish was to all intents and purposes quite dead, on severing the spinal cord, I have seen the tail thrashed upwards in a spasmodic jerk with considerable force.

I have had exactly the same thing occur with a big alligator, although it was to all intents and purposes quite dead. This took place when removing the head from one killed up the Bayano River.

Careful scientific research in this vast field, I am convinced, would yield extraordinary results. The United States Government have realised this, and are collecting data which I believe are already producing, apart from their scientific value, excellent commercial results.

An expedition ought to be organised in Great Britain for this purpose, and the cost of it, I feel assured, would be repaid many times over by the knowledge that would undoubtedly accrue.

Anyone taking a deep interest in the more primitive forms of life both on land and sea must keep an open mind and be prepared to receive rude shocks, as it is more than likely their preconceived ideas of creation will suffer badly. It is useless to rail against the theory of evolution when every day one has ocular demonstration of its truth. It is no work for the bigot or

religious fanatic—many long-cherished illusions are completely shattered when faced by the damning facts which can be seen every day in the primitive wilds.

Nothing is more absorbing—nothing more wonderful or elevating than to see nature in her virginal grandeur. It is then that the mystery of gigantic forces of which we know nothing are brought home to us, leaving us aghast at our utter ignorance. We return bigger, greater, broader-minded—yes, and I can even add cleaner from being cradled in the bosom of the great spaces.

Our work was finished, the big collection packed, and we sailed from Taboga to Balboa. After spending a little while at the International Hotel with Mr. and Mrs. John McEwen (two of the salt of the earth), we bade the President and a host of other friends a good-bye which left rather a lump in my throat.

Accompanied by Lady Richmond Brown and Sir William Cunningham, once more we made the passage of the Panama Canal from the Pacific to the Caribbean. At every lock many people assembled to wish us farewell, and the help I received from the United States authorities at Colon smoothed my difficulties in getting the yacht over to England. A sort of wooden dock was built for her, with steel hawsers attached, and in this their great 75-ton cranes raised her from the water, ultimately to be lowered on the decks of the Holland-American boat *Kinderdyk*.

Lady Richmond Brown travelled home on one of the Royal Mail steamers, but I elected to stick to the ship. My black scoundrel Robbie also accompanied me. He refused under any circumstances whatsoever to be parted from us. I think he still believes his mission in life is to look after us over here as he did in the wilds.

When I ultimately arrived at Southampton, owing to the courtesy of the Customs officials, the big collec-

tion was got through without difficulty to London, to be thrown open to the public through the kindness of Mr. Gordon Selfridge.

Whether I shall go back, who can say ? The insistent call of the wilds is very strong. I make no plans. On the lap of the gods be it !

**PRESIDENT'S
SECRETARIAT
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